



The Heritage of Literature Series

SECTION A NO. 26

A HERITAGE OF
WONDER STORIES

The Heritage of Literature Series

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A Heritage of Wonder Stories

BY
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WITH A FOREWORD BY
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With Line Drawings



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1951, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1961 and 1964*

PRINTED IN HONG KONG
BY THE CONTINENTAL PRINTING CO. LTD

FOREWORD

THESE stories belong to the springtime of life, to the April and May of childhood and to those years when tender buds are opening, and leaves are fresh and green. It is then that the passions of Romance and the darker side of private contest and national feud appear so far in the distance that only their beauty is seen; and then it is that the sweetness of a quietly flowing simplicity tastes as delicious and as mysterious as the magic drinks of Circe. These tales, gathered together from the rich heritage of the past, from saga, myth, legend and rhyme, were written by minstrel and poet, bard and singer: men who knew the mysteries of life and death, of love and sorrow, and who could weave their stories and their "tragical histories" in the melodious and familiar words of forthright people. They wrote and sang with a clear vision of the essence of life, and their telling words went straight to the hearts of the people who heard them. They are indeed the intimate expression of the imaginations of bygone ages, and no one to-day is more in tune with the spirit of these stories than the young child, and all those who are young at heart. In short, these stories are for the years of wonder and faith, not for the years of sophistication.

But many of these stories are never told to children, or else we have grown up before coming across them. And the fascinating names of the *Mabinogion*, the *Eddas*, *Sir Gawain* and *Roland*—to mention a few—have never become enshrined in the hearts of childhood. For these ancient and medieval stories

(all written before 1500) belong now to the student and the scholar, who are often too preoccupied to enjoy them. The difficulties are obvious: the original languages are varied and most of them no longer current, and many of the translations in existence are couched in English which is too difficult, too literal, or too stylised. For many readers it is essential that the language should be as direct and as unobtrusive as possible, so that they may make the closest contact themselves with the original conceptions of the artist. Hence these stories must be retold, and retold in language which does not attempt to reproduce the archaic style of the original, but which attempts to catch its spirit. And we ourselves must no longer neglect our rightful heritage of this fine variety of story from all the best known ancient and medieval literatures of the world: for in them is virtue, courtesy and courage.

P. GURREY.

18th January, 1938.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For permission to use copyright material we are indebted to the following:

Miss Enid Blyton for "Orpheus and Eurydice" from *TALES OF ANCIENT GREECE* published by Messrs. George Newnes Ltd; Messrs. J. Coker & Co. Ltd. for "Roland and the Robber Knight" and "How Roland Died" from *WONDER TALES OF THE MIDDLE AGES* by the Rev. J. Crowlesmith; Messrs. Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd. for "Brother Wolf" from *GOD'S TROUBADOUR* by Sophie Jewett; Messrs. Longmans Green & Co. Ltd. for "How Thor Went Among the Giants" from *GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH* by Alice Zimmern.

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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE AGIB

My name is Agib: my father was a king called Cassib. At his death I came to the throne, and soon after I set out on a tour of my kingdom. As my capital stood on the sea-coast, it was my custom to visit other cities by water; and I soon grew so fond of life on board ship that I decided I would go on a voyage of exploration beyond my own shores.

This was no sooner decided than I began to make preparations. I prepared ten stout ships, and going aboard one of them I set sail with my fleet.

For forty days our voyage went well; then strong winds sprang up, the sea became stormy, and we were driven out of our course by the tempest. When at last the storm died down we did not know where we were. We landed on an island to get water and food; then we set sail again. I had quite decided to return to my own land, but unfortunately the captain did not know in which direction it lay. We sailed for ten days more; then one day the look-out at the mast-head shouted that he could see land. As we came nearer, a black shapeless mass was visible on the horizon.

When this news was reported to the captain he turned pale with fear. The fear spread through the whole vessel, and I asked the captain why he was so alarmed.

"Alas, sir," said he, "the tempest has driven us so far out of our way, that to-morrow we shall find ourselves not far from that fearful black mountain."

"But tell me," I said, "what have we to fear from it?"

"We have death to fear," he answered, "for that mountain is not made of ordinary rock ; it is made of loadstone. When our fleet comes near to the rock, the loadstone will draw all the bolts and nails from the ships, and they will fall to pieces. The whole face of the rock is covered with sharp nails, drawn from ships that have been wrecked there, and any man who escapes the wreck will certainly be dashed to death on the points of the nails."

I was very alarmed when I heard this news, for I made up my mind that nothing could save me, and that I should perish with the crews of all ten ships. I asked the captain if there were no way of escape.

"None," he said. "At the summit of this mountain there stands a huge dome made of bronze, and on top of it a leaden man mounted on a bronze horse. People say that this statue is the cause of the shipwrecks on the rock beneath, and that the wrecks will never be ended till the statue has been overthrown."

By the following morning our fleet had approached very close to the island, and every moment increased our fear. At about midday the nails and bolts, and every other piece of metal about the ship, suddenly flew towards the rock, and struck it with a dreadful clangour. Immediately the ship fell to pieces, and we were all cast into the sea. By good fortune I managed to cling to a plank of wood, and with this I was carried ashore. Being protected by the wood, I managed to escape the nails, and landed without hurt. Then I examined the shore, but soon saw that every other member of the crews had perished.

I turned to the mountain and began to climb it,

aided by steps which had been cut out in the side. When I reached the summit I saw a bronze dome, topped by the statue of a man on horseback, just as the captain had said. I was thoroughly tired by now, and lay down under the dome to sleep.

While I was asleep an old man appeared to me in a dream. "Listen, Agib," said he. "When you wake, dig under your feet and you will find a brazen bow and three leaden arrows. Shoot these three arrows at the man on the horse, and he will immediately fall into the sea, while the horse will fall at your feet. Bury the horse in the place where you found the bow and arrows. After that the sea will begin to rise till it covers the whole mountain, and reaches to the foot of this dome. Across the sea there will come a small boat, rowed by a brass man, though not the same man as the one you will overthrow. Go on board with him and he will take you into another sea where you will be safe. Only I must warn you: if, at any time during the voyage, you mention to this man the name of God, you may never again come safe to shore."

I awoke from sleep and did exactly as the old man had said. I dug for the arrows, found them, and shot them at the brass man. As soon as the third arrow struck him he fell down the mountain-side into the sea, and his horse lay at my feet. I buried the horse as I was told to do. Then, gradually, the sea began to rise, higher and higher, till at last it reached the foot of the dome. I now perceived a boat approaching, with a man of brass in it. I climbed on board the boat without saying a word, and at once the man began to row away from the land.

For nine days and nine nights he rowed; at the end of this time I saw some islands in the distance. My joy

was so great that I forgot the warning I had received, and cried out: "Blessed be God! God be praised!"

Immediately the boat, with the brass man in it, sank to the bottom of the sea. I found myself in the water, and struck out at once for the nearest island. Darkness came down over the sea, and I was so tired that I believe I should never have got ashore, had not a mountainous wave carried me forward and swept me into a shallow place on the beach.

I landed in safety, dried my clothes, and passed the night on the sands. The next morning I began to look around me, and while I was occupied in this way I saw a small ship approaching the island. As soon as it touched the shore, ten slaves landed, carrying spades and other tools. My curiosity was aroused, and I climbed into a tall tree to watch them. They moved towards the middle of the island, where they began to dig in the earth. At last they uncovered a trap door, which they lifted up. From my place in the tree I could see a kind of underground cavern beneath. Into this cavern they carried several loads of furniture, which, with food and provisions, they had brought out of the ship. When this had been done an old man came from the boat, leading by the hand a lad about fifteen years old. These two went towards the trap door, and disappeared into the underground cavern.

When the party came up again, the young boy was not with them. The slaves replaced the trap door and covered it with earth; then they went back with the old man to the ship, and sailed away from the island.

My curiosity was even more excited by what I had seen. As soon as the boat was out of sight I quickly came down from the tree, and dug in the ground

at the spot where I had seen them put back the trap door. After a few minutes' digging I uncovered a thick stone slab, two or three feet square. With some exertion I lifted it up and saw underneath a flight of stone steps. I went straight down, and when I came to the bottom I found myself in a large chamber, lit by two torches, and very richly furnished. There was a couch at one end. On this couch lay a young man, lazily occupied in cooling himself with a fan. He sprang up with surprise and fear as I entered.

"Do not be alarmed," I said. "Whoever you are, you have nothing to fear from a prince such as I am. It is lucky for you that I happened to see that old man and his slaves burying you alive in this cavern. I hurried here as fast as I could to rescue you."

The young man smiled when he heard my words, and asked me politely to take a seat near him, so that he could tell me how he came to be shut up there. I did so, and he related the following strange tale.

"My father," he said, "is a rich jeweller. Before my birth he had a dream in which he learnt that he would soon have a son, but that his son's life would be very short. Soon afterwards I was born, as the dream had foretold, and my father became very anxious to know if the rest of his dream would come true. So he sent for some wise men, and asked them to tell him all that they could about the matter. They gazed long and earnestly at the stars; and at last they said I should live till I was fifteen, and that then I should run great risk of losing my life. 'About that time,' they went on, 'the brass man who stands on top of the magnetic mountain will be cast into the sea by Prince Agib, and fifty days afterwards your son will be killed by that prince.'

"You may be sure," went on the young man, "that my father was very alarmed when he heard what the wise men had to say. But he was still more alarmed when he heard, yesterday, that the brass man had indeed been overthrown ten days ago by Prince Agib. He hurried off with me to this island, where he had had this cavern prepared; and here I shall remain hidden till the fifty days are gone by. I have the very best hopes of being saved," went on the young man, "because I do not think that Prince Agib will ever think of looking for me underground."

This was the end of the young man's story. You can imagine how surprised I was to hear it, especially that part of it which concerned myself. I laughed when I thought of the strange prophecy. "What foolish old men they must have been!" I thought. "Just as if I would harm an innocent boy like this!"

I did not tell the young man that I was Prince Agib. Instead, I said, "My dear sir, you have no longer anything to fear. It would seem as though God caused me to be shipwrecked on this island, just so that I might stay here to keep you company, and protect you from any enemies. I will look after you during the rest of the fifty days; at the end of that time your father, when he comes to fetch you, will perhaps allow me to go on board his ship, so that I can make my way back to my own land."

He agreed joyfully to this plan, and we passed the time happily together. Day after day went by, and during the whole time I looked after the lad, bringing him water in the morning, preparing his meals for him, and making ready his couch at night. We soon became very fond of each other, and passed many happy hours together; and every day I thought

more and more how foolish those wise men were, when they said I should take this young man's life.

On the fiftieth day after I had thrown down the brass statue, my young friend rose from his couch and said: "See, it is the last day of my imprisonment here! To-day my father will come for me, and we shall go back to my home together. The time has been a happy one, thanks to your pleasant company."

He bathed himself and returned to his couch. Then he asked me if I would fetch him a melon and some sugar. "I would like to take some refreshment before my father comes," he said. "There will be little enough time for it then."

I brought the melon as he asked, but I could not find a knife to cut it with. "Tell me," I said, "where can I find a knife?"

"There is one on the shelf above my head," he answered.

I raised my arm to grasp the knife, but the shelf was high, and I had to stretch myself to reach it. Somehow, my foot became tangled in the covering of the bed; and the next moment I toppled over, and the knife buried itself deep in the young man's heart.

Full of fear I bent over him, but he was already dead. Then I burst into loud weeping, and cast myself on the ground. "Alas," I cried, "only a few hours more, and the lad would have been safe! And now what the wise men said has indeed come to pass! I am guilty of this young boy's death."

After I had spent some hours in this way, I began to rouse myself, and to think what might happen to me if the old man came and found me in the underground cavern. Sadly I mounted the steps and went outside. A vessel was already to be seen approaching the shore,

and knowing that the boy's father would kill me if he found me, I climbed into a tree, and hid myself amongst its foliage.

I was no sooner hidden than the ship touched the sand. The old man with his slaves landed, and approached the underground cavern. They lifted up the stone, which I had carefully put back into its place, and went down into the chamber below.

I heard cries and weeping from the cavern. When the party came up I saw that the old man had fainted, and was being carried out in the arms of the slaves. The body of the young boy was also brought out, and buried there in the sand. Then the slaves took back to their ship all the furniture and unused provisions, and soon afterwards they carried their master on board, and set sail again.

I spent many days of loneliness on the island, grieving for the loss of my friend. Then one day I observed that the sea was going down all round the coast, and I knew that by wading I could easily get across to the mainland. This I did without difficulty, and from there I set out on the journey back to my own country.

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

It happened many years ago that King Theseus of Athens made war upon Creon, King of Thebes, and slew him in a battle before the gates of his own city. In this battle Theseus captured two knights of Creon's family, two cousins called Palamon and Arcite, whom he took back with him to Athens and imprisoned in one of the high towers of his palace.

In this tower for many months the two knights lived and sorrowed. But one day Palamon, gazing out through the bars of his prison, saw below in the garden a young girl walking. She was the sister-in-law of Theseus, Emilia, who had come out to gather white and red flowers. Palamon looked upon her sweet face and her tress of yellow hair, and he seemed almost to swoon with love and desire. "Alas," he cried, starting back from the window, "now I am slain utterly!"

"Why, what can you mean!" enquired Arcite. "Why are you so suddenly slain?"

"Alas," cried Palamon again, "I am slain by the sight of a fair creature whom I have seen in the garden below. I do not know if she be maid or goddess, but for love of her I shall certainly die."

Now Arcite went to the window-bars to look; and at once he began to moan and complain as his cousin had done. "Now be my witness," he cried, "that I take this bright lady to be my own love, and I am the first to claim her. For you, my cousin, did not know whether she was maid or goddess; but I know her to be a maid indeed, and she must and shall be my lady."

Then the cousins fell to arguing as to which of them was Emilia's own true knight.

However, after some time it happened that a friend of Arcite came to court and begged Theseus to set him free. And Theseus agreed to do so, but told Arcite that he must return to Thebes and never again, upon pain of death, show his face in Athens.

So Arcite went away and lived in Thebes, and always he sorrowed for the love of Emilia. "How fortunate is my cousin Palamon," he would say, "who is still able to have sight of my lady! If only I were again in Athens, so that I might see my lady and serve her!"

At last one day, seeing his own face in a glass, he perceived that sorrow had so changed him that he might safely return unrecognized to Athens. And to Athens he went, and found employment at court as a servant. There he lived in secrecy, and sometimes he had sight of Emilia.

Meanwhile, Palamon lived on in his prison tower; until at last, with the help of a friend, he escaped and fled out of the city to a wood near by. Here, as he lay in the bushes, he heard the voice of a man, and he knew it for the voice of Arcite. For Arcite had come to that same wood to ponder on his woes. "Ah," he cried aloud, "how unhappy is my lot! I, who was once a knight of Creon, am now a servant in the court of my enemy Theseus. Worse still, I die for love of the bright-eyed Emilia!"

When Palamon heard these words he was filled with anger. He came rushing out of the bushes, and leapt upon his cousin with these words: "Ah, Arcite, you false traitor, the time has come when you are to die! I have heard your secrets, and I know that you are hiding in the court of Theseus in order that you may have sight of Emilia! But let us waste no time, but let

us fight it out, here and now; for either you must die or give up all claim to the lady I love!"

"Let it be so," replied Arcite, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment. And they drew their swords and rushed together.

But it happened that on the same day Theseus had ridden forth to hunt, and with him his queen and the fair Emilia; and when he came upon the two knights fighting he rode between them and commanded them to put up their swords. But how great was his wonder when he found who the two knights were, and how great his anger when he discovered why they fought together! He would have given orders for them both to be put to death had not the two ladies pleaded for them. "For all that they did wrong," said they, "was done in the cause of love."

"Then this is what I will do," said Theseus. "I will allow both knights to go free, and they shall return to Thebes; but in a year's time both of them shall come back here to Athens, each with a hundred knights, and the companies shall fight a great battle in the field; and whichever of these two is first taken prisoner shall give up all claim to Emilia, while the other shall become her husband." Everyone was glad when the king made this decision, and the two cousins departed joyfully for Thebes.

A year later they returned, each with his hundred knights. On the morning before the day of the tournament, Palamon and Arcite went each to a temple to pray. Palamon prayed to the goddess of Love, and asked that he should either marry Emilia or die; and it seemed to him that the statue of the goddess bowed its head in answer to his prayer. But Arcite prayed to the god of War; and it seemed to him that the god's

statue opened its lips and cried "Victory!" So each knight was happy, and on the next morning each went forth with his followers to the field.

Who shall tell all the feats of arms that were done that day? For they fought for long hours, and often rested and refreshed themselves; till at last Palamon was seized by the knights of Arcite's side, and borne down from his horse. Then Theseus cried out that the fighting must end; "for Palamon has been captured," he said, "and the victory goes to Arcite!"

There was great shouting and cheering at this; and Arcite, filled with joy, rode gaily forward, fixing his eyes upon Emilia. But as he came near to her his horse shied suddenly, and he was thrown with great violence on the crupper of his saddle. He rolled from his horse, and lay upon the ground stunned.

Then all rejoicing was at an end, and a hush came over the people. Arcite was lifted up and carried into the palace, and all the while he cried out for Emilia. She came to where he lay, and he murmured: "My dear lady, for long I have served you as your own true knight; I beg you now to cast an eye upon Palamon, for he has served you as long and as faithfully as I. If ever you think to be married, do not forget him." And saying this Arcite turned his head, and his spirit passed from him.

On the following day the body of Arcite was carried to its tomb, and never did knights and ladies grieve as did Theseus, and Emilia, and Palamon himself. But after some time had passed, Theseus declared that no better thing could be done than that Palamon should be married to Emilia. Palamon joyfully agreed, and Emilia also; and they were married amidst the rejoicings of all the court and the people of Athens.

THE WOOING OF BRUNHILD

GUNTHER, the king of the Rhineland, had heard much about the beauty of Brunhild, who dwelt in Issland in a castle near to the sea. Although he had never seen her, Gunther was anxious to win her as his bride; and he was not in the least daunted when he heard of the difficulties to be overcome before he could wed her. For Brunhild, besides being beautiful, was exceedingly strong; and she was so proud of her strength that she swore she would never love a knight until he could prove his strength to be greater than her own. Brunhild was very skilful in the use of the spear, and the knight who would be her husband had to overcome her in spear-play. Also she could throw a heavy stone a great distance, and could leap after the stone to the spot where it had fallen. Her wooers had to be able both to throw and to leap further than she could. If they succeeded, they took her to wife; but if they failed they were beheaded.

To overcome Brunhild in these three things was not so easy as it sounded, but Gunther laughed when he heard of the difficulties. "There was never yet a woman born," he said, "whom I could not overcome with a single hand!"

His friend, King Siegfried of the Netherlands, who was staying with him at this time, shook his head very doubtfully. "Brunhild is stronger than you think," he warned him. "Why, four men like yourself could not overcome the girl! But if you listen to my advice, you will be able to win her without any difficulty."

"What is your plan, then?" asked Gunther.

"Let us go on a visit to this maiden, and take with us only two knights besides ourselves. If you fail to beat her at the games, she will kill not only you but all your companions. Four of us will be quite enough to be killed at one time. When we get to Brunhild's country you will learn the rest of my plan."

So they made ready their ship to sail to Issland. They took on board their horses and armour, and loaded the hold with a cargo of rich meats and wines, for it was a twelve days' journey to Brunhild's country. Then they set sail down the Rhine, and in due course they came to the sea. The wind favoured them, and at the end of twelve days they came in sight of land. From their ship they could see castles, and broad meadows stretching to the horizon.

"Whose lands are these?" inquired Gunther of his friend. "I never saw richer nor fairer in my life."

"They are all Brunhild's," said Siegfried. "Her lands are fair; and her maidens are fair, too. Now listen, all of you, and when we stand before the queen be sure that you all tell the same story. Pretend that Gunther is my king, and that I one of his knights. That will make it easier for me to help Gunther win the princess."

They all promised, and the ship came near the shore, in a place just before the castle. They could now see a group of maidens assembled at the windows to watch their arrival.

"What lovely maidens!" said Gunther. "Do you know any of them, Siegfried?"

"Well, tell me first," said Siegfried, "which of them you would choose if you had your desire."

Gunther looked, and saw a maiden in snow-white robes standing a little apart from the rest. "If I had

my choice," said he, "that lady should be my wife."

"You have chosen well," said his friend, "for that is the beautiful Brunhild."

Meanwhile, in the castle, after the ladies had looked their fill at the four knights, their queen suddenly told them to come away from the window, and not allow themselves to be stared at by strangers. They obeyed, but after they had put on their finest clothing they came back, and peered at the warriors through the loophole. They saw them disembark, and lead their horses safely to land. Then King Siegfried held Gunther's stirrup while he mounted. (It was probably the first time in his life that Siegfried had ever helped another man to mount his horse.) The ladies, watching Gunther get on horse, remarked to one another: "He is their leader! Yes, he is their leader!"

The knights then rode towards the castle. Brunhild's men threw open the castle gate, and welcomed the strangers to their queen's abode. They halted them to dismount, and the chief steward said: "I will give us your swords and your armour."

"Indeed, no! We will carry them ourselves!" said one of the knights, but Siegfried told them it was custom of Brunhild's court that no stranger should enter it armed, so they gave up their shields and weapons.

While the knights were being attended to by the officers of the court, word was brought to Brunhild that four warriors in rich apparel had arrived from across the sea, and that they wished to speak to her.

"Who are these knights?" asked the queen.

"Well," said one of the courtiers, "although I never set eyes on them before, one of them looks to me very much like the mighty Siegfried. The second of the

company is tall and sturdily built, and if he is as strong as he looks, he is probably some rich and mighty prince. The others also look hardy and bold, and I advise you to welcome them all."

Brunhild replied: "I fear no living man, and if Siegfried has come here to woo me, then that is the end of him! Call the warriors in."

They came, and the queen spoke courteously to them.

"You are welcome to my court, Siegfried," she said. "Why have you come here?"

"You are doing me great honour," Siegfried replied, "in greeting me first, before my master here. My master comes to woo you, for he has heard many stories of your great beauty. His name is Gunther, and he is king of the Rhineland."

"Very well," she answered, "your lord must overcome me in three contests. If he succeeds, I am his; if he fails in even one of them, then you must all lose your lives."

Hagen, one of the other two knights, said to the queen: "Lady, if you will tell our lord what these three contests are, he will be more than ready to set about them for your sake."

"First, he must overcome me in spear-play; secondly, he must throw further than I can; thirdly, he must be able to leap as far as he can throw." Turning to Gunther she added: "Do not be too confident that you can manage all these, for they are not so easy as they sound. Think carefully before you undertake anything so difficult."

Then Siegfried went to Gunther and whispered: "Don't worry. Speak boldly to the queen, and say you are ready to compete with her. I have a plan to give you secret help."

So Gunther said to the queen: "For your sake, fair lady, I would attempt more than this. If I cannot win you as my bride I am willing to lose my head."

"Come then," said the queen, "we will start the contests at once." And they all left the castle and went outside to an open space, where the games were to be held. Here the queen put on her armour, while her servants brought her a tremendous golden shield with studs of iron, so vast that it took four men to carry it. Hagen was very dismayed when he saw it, and murmured: "It's the devil itself you've come to woo, Gunther!"

Now while the queen and Gunther were arming themselves, Siegfried had stolen away without being observed, and had gone down to where their ship was anchored by the shore. Here he found and put on his magic cloak. This cloak had the power of making him invisible, and also could give him the strength of twelve men. Unseen by anybody, he returned to the place where the games were being held.

Brunhild's spear had been fetched, carried in by three men. The knights turned pale when they saw it, and Gunther thought: "This is the end of me. How I wish I were back in the Rhineland, and safe in my own castle!"

Just then, something touched him on the sleeve. He turned sharply, but could see no one. Then a voice whispered: "It is I, your friend Siegfried. Don't be afraid: I shall be here all the while to help you. Don't try to fight; just make the movements, and I will do the work. Let me hold your shield, and all will be well."

Gunther took heart when he heard these words; he let Siegfried take the shield, and stood behind it, waiting.

"Are you ready?" called the queen, and Gunther nodded his head.

Then Brunhild hurled her spear. It struck the shield of Gunther with tremendous force, pierced right through it, and sent sparks flying from Siegfried's mail. The blood poured from his mouth, and he dropped to one knee, still holding the shield before Gunther. But the next moment he was up again, and plucking the spear from the shield he turned the handle end towards Brunhild. "I cannot kill a maiden so fair as she is," he thought, and he hurled back the spear so that it struck Brunhild's shield with stunning violence, and threw her to the ground.

She leapt up again, and red with rage she cried:

"Well, the first game goes to you, King Gunther."

Next she seized on a huge stone, which twelve men had placed before her on the ground, and threw it at least twenty-four yards. Then, with a great rattling of armour, she sprang after it, and leapt not only the full distance, but further. Siegfried and Gunther now went to the place where the stone lay, and Gunther placed his hands on it. But it was Siegfried who lifted it and threw it. It travelled considerably further than Brunhild had been able to throw it. Then Siegfried seized Gunther by the waist and whispered: "Now jump!" But it was Siegfried himself who really jumped, carrying Gunther with him. And so great was Siegfried's strength that they landed even beyond the spot where the stone had fallen.

No one suspected that Gunther had not overcome Brunhild by his own strength. The queen was furious, but for all that she said to her followers: "Come forward, my knights and courtiers, and meet your new king."

Then all Brunhild's followers came forward and laid their weapons at the feet of Gunther, and one by one they acknowledged him as their ruler. He made a courteous speech in return, and taking Brunhild by the hand he led her into the castle.

While all this was happening Siegfried had returned to the ship, and had taken off the magic cloak. Afterwards he went back to the great hall of the castle, and said to Gunther: "What are we waiting for? Why don't we go out and hold the sports with which the queen proposes to try your strength?"

The queen replied: "How strange! Didn't you know, Siegfried? The games are over, and Gunther has won them all!"

"What a pity you missed them, Siegfried!" said Hagen. "You see," he went on to the queen, "Siegfried was down at the ship when the sports were going on, so he knew nothing about them."

"Well, I am glad to hear that you were successful, my lord," said Siegfried to Gunther. "And now Brunhild must leave her country, and come back with us to the Rhineland."

"Not yet," replied Brunhild. "I must first call together all my people and relatives, so that I can bid them good-bye."

She sent out messengers to all parts of the country, and day by day the friends of Brunhild arrived in great number. At last Hagen said: "I'm not sure that I like this. The queen is bringing together a great many knights. What if she refuses to keep her promise, and tries to drive us out of the kingdom?"

"Leave it to me," said Siegfried. "I will bring you a thousand knights each of which is a match for any knight here. I shall have to go away for a few days,

Gunther; and if the queen asks any questions, tell her I left by your command."

So Siegfried put on his magic cloak again and went down to the harbour, where he took a small boat. Rowing with unbelievable speed he reached, in a night and a day, the land of the Nibelungs of which he was master. Here he summoned a thousand knights to come on board ship, and follow him back to Issland. On their arrival they went straight up to the castle to greet the queen.

Brunhild wondered much at the nobility and strength of the newly-arrived knights. "What men are these," she asked Gunther, "who bear themselves so proudly?"

"These are my men," answered Gunther, who had never set eyes on them before. "I left them some distance behind me on my way here; I sent Siegfried for them, and now they have come."

"Shall I go out and greet them?" asked the queen.

"Yes, go and welcome them," answered Gunther, and Brunhild went out to receive Siegfried and the knights.

Gunther was now anxious to set sail with the queen; so Brunhild said farewell to her kinsmen and chose from among them a knight to rule in her place, until Gunther should send a governor from his own country. Then Brunhild's treasure was loaded on to the ship. She took with her twenty chests of gold, for she was anxious that Gunther's people should know how rich she was. Finally the queen and her ladies came on board, followed by Gunther and the knights. Soon the king of the Rhineland set sail with his bride, proud of his success in winning her, and little knowing what evils she was to bring upon him.



THE ONE-EYED GIANT

We had been sailing all night in the darkness, for there was a mist over the sea, and the moon was hidden by clouds. Before dawn our ships were beached on the island which the mighty Cyclopes inhabited. Here we slept, till rosy-fingered dawn shone out over the water.

At dawn we rose, and taking our bows and spears we set out to shoot the goats which were so plentiful on the hillsides. By midday we had goat's flesh in plenty, so we brought red wine from our ships and feasted on the shore till sundown. As we ate, we looked across the island to the part where the Cyclopes dwelt, and saw the smoke of their homes, and heard the voices of flocks and men. These Cyclopes, as we afterwards found, were a wild and lawless race, with no respect for gods or men. They had no ships, and had never departed from their own shores. Each was a giant of enormous stature, with one eye in the middle of his forehead. One of them, we could see, shepherded his flocks apart from the others, and lived in a cave alone, not so very far from our camp.

That night we lay and slept on the shore. As soon as rosy-fingered dawn shone out over the water I rose up, and taking the twelve best men of my company I set out to visit the solitary Cyclops, in the hope that he would welcome and entertain strangers. Before leaving the ships, I filled a goatskin with dark wine and took it with me, for a voice within me told me that I should need it.

After a short journey we came to the cave of this Cyclops. The cave was wide, and deep, and lofty,

with an outer court of stone before the entrance. We went in, and found huge pails of milk and baskets of cheese, folds with young lambs and kids, and wood piled up to make a fire. We looked all round, but the Cyclops was not there.

"Come," said one of my men, "let us take some of the cheeses, and drive off the kids and lambs to the ship."

"Not so," said I. "We will wait here till the giant returns, and see whether he is hospitable to strangers."

So we kindled a fire and sat down, and ate some of the cheeses while we awaited the Cyclop's homecoming. At sundown he came, shepherding his flocks before him, and carrying in his arms a load of dry wood for the fire. He cast down the timber with a great crash on the floor. We were so terrified at the noise that we turned and fled to the innermost corner of the cave. From here we watched him drive all his sheep and goats into the cave, and when they were all in he raised a huge rock, so large that twenty waggons could not have carried it, and set it down in the doorway.

Then he sat down and milked the sheep and goats, and beneath each ewe he placed her lamb. Next he set aside the milk for his supper. When these tasks were finished he lit the fire, and by its light he espied us huddled together in a corner of the cave.

"Strangers," said he, "who are you, and where do you come from?"

His deep voice, echoing through the cavern, his huge limbs and terrible countenance struck fear into the hearts of all of us. Yet, in spite of my fear I answered:

"Cyclops, we are Greeks, driven from Troy and forced to wander far over the seas. We have come to ask you, in the name of the gods, if you will entertain

us as it is the custom for men to entertain strangers."

The Cyclops laughed a great ringing laugh, and said: "Know that the Cyclopes have no respect for your gods, for we are better men than they. But tell me, where did you leave your ship when you arrived? Was it at the far end of the island, or is it beached close by?"

I answered him cunningly. "The sea-god has broken my ship to pieces on the rocks of your island, and these twelve men and I are all that have escaped from drowning."

He answered no word; but suddenly he sprang up, and stretching his huge hand he seized two of my companions as if they had been new-born puppies. He dashed their brains out against the ground, cut them into little pieces and ate them, bones and all. After he had taken his fill of human flesh he washed it down with milk, and stretching himself out in the cave he lay back to sleep.

I pondered for a while. Should I steal out upon him, sword in hand, and stab him in the breast as he slept? For a second or two I stood with drawn blade; then I remembered that if I killed him there would be no one to move away the rock from the doorway, and we should be held prisoners in the cave. So we wept, and all that night we slept little.

Now when rosy-fingered dawn shone out again, the giant rose up and kindled his fire. He milked the ewes and goats, and beneath each ewe he set her lamb. Then, when all his work was done, he seized two more men and made ready his midday meal. After the meal he moved away the great door-stone, and drove his flock out of the cave, carefully putting the stone back afterwards, so that his prisoners should not

escape. Then he set off with his flock towards the hills.

"Now," said I, "we must make some plan to overcome the giant." And I ordered the men to cut off a portion of the great club of green olive-wood which lay on the floor of the cave. They hacked it off with their swords, while I sharpened it to a point at one end, and afterwards hardened the point in the fire. Then we hid it away in the depths of the cave.

"Now you must draw lots among yourselves, to decide who shall share this adventure with me." They cast lots, and four men were chosen.

At sundown the Cyclops returned to the cave, rolled away the stone from the door and drove in his sheep and goats. He milked his flock, and beneath each ewe he placed her lamb. Then, when his work was done, he seized two more of my men, and made a hearty supper of them. After he had eaten, I took some of the red wine I had brought with me, and standing by his side I spoke to him.

"Cyclops, drink this wine, which I have brought as a friendly offering to you. You may know now what kind of cargo our ship carried."

He took the bowl and drank the wine, and was delighted with it. He asked me for a second bowl, saying: "Give me more of your wine, and tell me your name so that I may make you a gift in return."

Three times I brought him wine, and three times he was foolish enough to drink it. When the wine had begun to overpower him, and he felt drowsy, I went close to him and spoke gently in his ear. "You were asking my name just now. I will tell you it, and then you shall give me the gift you promised me. My name is Noman—Noman is what my parents and companions always call me."

"Very well, Noman. This shall be your gift: of all the seven I will eat you the last."

Then he sank backwards, and with upturned face he fell into a deep slumber.

Hurriedly we took out the stake from its hiding-place, and thrust it into the glowing embers of the fire. While it was heating I turned to my companions, who were beginning to get rather nervous, and did my best to comfort them. Just before the stake was about to burst into flame, I and the chosen four caught hold of it, lifted it from the fire, and carried it to where the Cyclops lay sleeping. The four men raised the stake above their heads, while I directed the point to his eye. In this way we blinded him.

He raised a terrible cry so that the rock rang all around us, and we fled in fear to the back of the cave. The Cyclops sprang to his feet and screamed with the agony of the wound. His voice awoke all the other Cyclopes who lived in caves along the hill-tops, and they came running in from every side, clamouring round the mouth of the cave.

"What is wrong with you, Polyphemus? Why do you disturb our sleep like this? Surely no man is trying to take your life, or drive away your flocks?"

From the depths of the cave Polyphemus replied: "My friends, Noman is slaying me! Noman is taking my life!"

The Cyclopes replied: "If it is not a man who is injuring you, then your suffering must be sent by the gods. Pray to your father, the god of the sea, and ask him to relieve your pain. We can do nothing for you."

Then the Cyclopes all returned to their caves. I laughed silently to think how they had been deceived. Polyphemus, groaning with pain, groped his way to the

entrance of the cave, rolled away the rock a little, and sat in the entrance to prevent any of us making an escape.

I had already formed my plan. I took the rams of the flock, and bound them together in threes. Under the middle ram of each three I tied one of my comrades, using as ropes the green vines which had been the giant's bed. Thus there were three rams to each man. As for myself, I chose the largest and strongest of the flock and clung beneath him, taking firm hold of his wool. In this manner we waited anxiously for the dawn.

As soon as rosy-fingered dawn shone over the water, the rams started to go out through the door of the cave, which was now only wide enough for three or four to pass at a time. Polyphemus sat at the entrance, and felt the sheep all over as they went by him. He feared that my men might be riding on their backs, and never guessed, in his foolishness, that they were bound underneath. Last of all came my own ram, weighed down by his unusual burden. When he reached the doorway, Polyphemus caressed him lovingly, and spoke gently to him.

"Dear ram, I wonder why you are the last to come out to-day—you, who have always been the first of the flock! Can it be that you are grieved by the loss of your master's eye? If only you could tell me where Noman now hides, I swear that I would dash out his brains on the floor of the cave. But he has not yet escaped my anger."

He sent the ram on to join the others. When he had gone a little way, I dropped to the ground and went up to the other rams. Quickly I untied my companions, and looking carefully about us as we went, we drove the sheep down to the shore.

Here we were met by the companions we had left

behind. They were overjoyed to see us, but were smitten with grief when they heard of the fate of the others.

"This is no time for weeping," I said. "Let us drive the sheep on board, and sail away as fast as possible."

We embarked at once, and by rowing hard we had soon left the land some little distance behind. We were still within earshot of the cave when I raised my voice, and called out mockingly to the Cyclops: "Cyclops, you are rightly punished for your wickedness. Shame on you, who ate your guests when they came asking hospitality! The gods have rewarded you as you deserve."

Polyphemus was enraged when he heard these words, and breaking off a huge piece of the rock he hurled it in the direction from which my voice came. The sea heaved as the rock fell into it, and the backwash of the water carried our ship to land again. I caught up a long pole and pushed us off quickly, calling to my companions to thrust in their oars and row straight out to sea.

When we had gone twice the distance from the shore, I prepared to speak to the Cyclops again. But my men begged me to be silent. "For," said they, "we have already been carried back to the shore once by the strength of his arm. If he had heard our voices while we were beached, he would have hurled another rock and crushed our ship to timber."

In spite of their warnings, I could not resist raising my voice again. "Cyclops," I cried out, "if any man should ask who blinded your eye, say that it was done by the bravest of all Greeks, the destroyer of cities, the conqueror of Troy: mighty Odysseus!"

Then I turned our ship and set its course once more for Ithaca, our home.

SAINT FRANCIS AND BROTHER WOLF

THE huts in the plain below Assisi were the home of the Little Poor Men,¹ in so far as they had a home; but like the Knights Errant, they were wanderers always. Just as Sir Lancelot or Sir Gawain would ride away from the court of King Arthur to fight for any forlorn lady, or for any hard-pressed knight, so Brother Leone or Brother Francis would set forth at any moment to carry help to the miserable. But the Brothers went on foot, and they wore no armour, and fought no battles; yet they had need to be as brave as the best of knights, for they went among the sick, and cared for those who were dying of most terrible diseases. They met fierce enemies, too. Many people hated them because they spoke without fear in the streets, saying that pride and greed and war are wicked, and that folk should live by love and labour, not by fighting and robbery. When people saw that the Brothers really lived as they preached: that, when they were stoned by cruel hands, they returned only gentleness for anger, many began to listen gladly, and even barons and princes came to love Francis and his Brothers, as the poor and wretched had loved them from the first.

Francis himself had a manner so sweet and winning that no one could refuse to listen to him; and sometimes he used to be sent for to make peace between two enemies, because even angry men, listening to his voice, forgot their hatred, and were ready to forgive and to be friends again. The stories say, moreover, that he

¹ The Little Poor Men was the name given to St. Francis and his Brotherhood

could control not fierce men only, but the fiercest of wild beasts.

One of the places which Francis often visited is a little city called Gubbio, about fifteen miles north of Assisi. Once, when Brother Francis came to Gubbio, all the city was in terror because of a wolf, the largest and fiercest ever known. The huge creature prowled about the country, devouring sheep and goats; but, worse than that, it fell upon men, and had killed more than one shepherd. No man dared to go out of the gates alone, and even three or four together went armed, as if to battle, for the beast came close to the city walls, and his strength was as that of three hunters.

Bands of citizens had been out to seek the wolf, but had found only the track of his big feet, and the bones of the victims that he had eaten. Every night the folk of Gubbio, safely barred within their stone houses, told a new story of the four-footed enemy : how a shepherd had lost his fattest sheep and two of his best dogs; how a soldier, riding alone, toward evening, from the next town, had seen a great grey creature moving in the woods by the roadside, and had spurred his horse to its best speed and reached the gate with the beast close at the heels of the frightened horse. Night after night the children of Gubbio shivered in their beds, thinking of a long shadow that crept about the city walls in the moonlight, and seeming to hear the pad of four swift feet, coming nearer and nearer.

Brother Francis had been often in Gubbio and was well known there, and much loved, and therefore all the people turned to him with the stories of their suffering. He was sorry, says the old tale, to see the folk wishing, but not daring, to go outside the gates, because the wolf was most terrible and fierce. To the

astonishment and horror of everybody, Francis declared that he would himself go out and meet the wolf.

Though all the crowd begged him not to venture, and filled his ears with accounts of the cruelty of the beast, the Little Poor Man, followed by one or two Brothers, went out from the city gate and down the road toward the spot where the wolf was thought to lurk. Behind the Brothers came the citizens of Gubbio, still frightened, but curious to see what would happen, and, it may be, quieted by the coolness and fearlessness of Francis. Close at the heels of the Brothers marched certain venturesome boys, and at the very end of the procession dangled a group of smaller, timider children, round-eyed and open-mouthed, who clutched each other's hands, and were always ready to scamper home at a moment's warning.

About a quarter of a mile beyond the gate, where a wood of tall oaks and walnuts shadowed the road, those who were nearest turned pale at the sight of the wolf, coming swiftly along, with his great jaws open, eager to spring upon Brother Francis, who walked ahead and alone. He went, not as a soldier goes to meet an enemy, but as one might go out to meet a welcome friend.

As the unarmed man and the wild beast neared each other, Francis called, cheerily: "Come hither, Brother Wolf! I ask you, for Christ's sake, to do no harm to me nor to any one." Then the crowd saw, with wonder, that the terrible wolf stopped running, and that the great, wicked jaws closed; and, presently, the creature came softly up to Brother Francis and, meek as a lamb, lay down at his feet. And Francis spoke to him as one man might reason with another: "Brother Wolf, you

do much harm in all this countryside, and you have committed many crimes, hunting and killing God's creatures. Not only have you killed and eaten beasts, but you have dared to kill men, made in God's image, and, therefore, you deserve to be punished like the worst of thieves and murderers; and all the people cry out and murmur against you; and everybody is your enemy." The wolf lay perfectly still, with his head flat in the dust of the road, and his red tongue lolled out like that of a wicked hound. The people forgot their fright, and spread themselves in a circle that all might see and hear; the children tiptoed closer, to look at the monster who had filled all their dreams with terror. "But I wish, Brother Wolf," went on the voice of Francis, "to make peace between you and this folk, so that you shall not harm them any more; and they shall forgive you all your misdeeds, and neither the men nor the dogs shall trouble you any longer."

Then, with body and head and tail, the great wolf seemed to agree to all that Brother Francis said. Perhaps the wolf somewhat wondered what he should do for dinner, if he could not kill a sheep nor a child; perhaps he was so charmed by this strange, gentle voice that he forgot all about his dinner.

Brother Francis did not forget, as his next words showed. "Brother Wolf," said he, "since you are honestly willing to make and keep this peace, I promise you that, as long as you live, the men of this place shall give you food, so that you shall never go hungry; for I know well that it is hunger that had made you do all this evil. But I want you to promise me, in return, that you will never harm any human being, nor any animal. Will you promise me this?" And the wolf nodded his

head, as if he said: "Yes, I promise." And Francis said: "Brother Wolf, I want you to make me so sure of your promise that I cannot doubt it." The man held out his hand, and the beast lifted his paw and laid it clumsily on Brother Francis's palm, as much as to say: "Here is my hand. I will keep my part of the treaty." "And now," said Francis, "I wish you, Brother Wolf, to come with me, and not to be afraid, and we will finish this business."

Francis turned back toward the city, and the wolf walked beside him like a pet lamb; and the people of Gubbio followed, in great wonder, silently. But, once within the city, they spread the news from street to street and everybody, big and little, young and old, crowded into the square to see Brother Francis and the wolf.

Beside the fountain, in the centre of the square, stood the Little Poor Man in his grey gown, with the great, grey beast at his side. When he spoke, his clear voice carried far, and all the crowd fell silent, striving to hear. "Listen, my friends," said Francis. "Brother Wolf, who is here before you, has promised me on his honour never to hurt you again in any way; and you, in your turn, must promise to give him all that he needs. I will go surety for him that he will keep his promise." And all the people, with one voice, pledged themselves to feed the wolf, and not to harm him.

Then, before them all, Brother Francis said to the wolf: "And you, Brother Wolf, promise again before all this people that you will keep faith with them, and will hurt no man, nor animal, nor any living thing." Then the wolf knelt down and bent his head and said, as well as he could, with his body, his head and his ears, that he meant to keep his word. And Brother

Francis said: " Give me your hand here, before all the people, as you did outside the gate," and the big grey paw was laid again in the hand of Brother Francis, while all the people shouted to heaven for joy that God had sent so good a man to deliver them from so terrible a beast.

After this Brother Wolf lived in Gubbio, and went about tamely from door to door, even entering the houses, without doing harm or being harmed. He was well fed and politely treated by everybody, and not a dog dared to bark at him. He must have led a long life of evil-doing before his change of heart, for, at the end of two years, he died of old age. When he died, all the citizens of Gubbio mourned for him greatly, for his own sake, and because the sight of him walking so meekly through the streets had made them always remember the goodness of Brother Francis.

SOPHIE JEWETT.

BEOWULF AND THE MONSTERS OF THE FEN

HROTHGAR, a prince of the Danes, after many victorious battles against his enemies, built for himself a mighty dwelling in his own country. Neither gold nor silver was spared in adorning it. Over the great door were placed the antlers of a hart, from which the huge building took its name: the Hall of the Hart. To this hall the prince retired, meaning to spend the rest of his days in peace, feasting with his followers.

But his hopes of peace and contentment came to nothing. A man-eating monster called Grendel, who lived in the marshy country near by, had watched with greedy eyes the building of the prince's hall, and when it was finished he listened each night outside the walls to the sounds of feasting and music within. At last he could bear it no longer. One night when the feasting was over, and the warriors of Hrothgar lay asleep on their couches, he crept into the hall, hungry for prey. He seized no less than thirty men, and carried them off to the fen where he had his dwelling.

That was only the beginning of Hrothgar's misfortunes. Many a night the dreaded creature came again, and each time he tore to pieces every warrior that came within his reach. Soon it was a bold warrior who would sleep in the hall. The men began to find beds for the night in places where the monster was less likely to seek them out. Hrothgar and his followers, who had hoped for some peace after many weary years of fighting, now passed their days in misery and their nights in fear.

One day a strange ship, borne into harbour by a following wind, touched the sand on the shores near Hrothgar's dwelling. With much gleaming and rattle of armour, a band of warriors leapt out on to the beach. The watchman of the Danes, who guarded the coast, wondered who the strangers could be, and rode towards them, brandishing his spear.

" What warriors are you," he called out, " who come thus, clad in armour, over the waters to our shore? I must know your business before you go a step further."

The leader of the troop made answer. " My name," he said, " is Beowulf, and I am a prince of the Geats. We have heard that some kind of enemy, some fearful monster, is spreading terror through this land, and slaughtering the people in the darkness of night. I have come with my companions to seek out Hrothgar, your prince, and to offer him help against his enemy."

The watchman, hearing this, at once permitted the visitors to land, and greeted them with great courtesy. He pointed out to them the Hall of the Hart, which lay not far off, gleaming in the sunlight; and they went on their way till they arrived at the hall itself, where they were at once led before Hrothgar. Beowulf stepped boldly forward and addressed the prince.

" Greetings, O Hrothgar! I have heard rumours of the evil deeds of this fearful Grendel, who visits your hall at night and slaughters the best of your warriors. I have come, with my followers, to do my best to rid you of the demon who causes such sorrow in your land."

When he heard the purpose of Beowulf's visit, the old prince shook his head. " Great Beowulf," said he, " your might is well known all over the world; but you do not know the danger of that which you wish to attempt. Often enough my own warriors, after drink-

ing much ale, have boasted that they would wait, sword in hand, till Grendel came. What happened? In the morning we found this hall, where you now stand, stained horribly with blood. Blood dripped everywhere from the tables and benches; but the warriors we saw no more."

Not daunted by this speech, Beowulf begged again to be allowed to try his strength against Grendel, and at last with a heavy heart Hrothgar consented. When night approached, he himself quitted the hall with all his followers, leaving Beowulf alone with his men. Darkness came; the men lay down on their couches. All except Beowulf were quickly asleep.

Then from the mists of the marshy country came Grendel. Boldly he approached the entry of Hrothgar's palace and laid his mailed claw on the door. Although it was barred with iron it opened immediately at his thrust. He trod softly across the gleaming floor of the hall; his fiery eyes saw the sleeping warriors lying together, and his heart was glad. He made up his mind that he would feast as he had never feasted before.

He stretched out his hand, seized a sleeping warrior, and tore him limb from limb. First he sucked the blood from the veins; then he devoured the corpse in a few huge mouthfuls, leaving not even the feet and hands. He turned to seize another warrior: this time it was Beowulf himself. But Beowulf was ready for him. He gripped the monster firmly by the arm, and held on with all his might.

Then followed a most desperate combat. Grendel knew at once that he was in the hold of a foe whose strength was more than his own. He decided that the most he could hope for was to get away with his life.

But Beowulf would not loosen his grip. The hall rang with the noise of the strife. The fingers of the monster burst, and still Beowulf held on. The warriors, awakened, leapt up from their couches; they watched with awe the furious struggles of the fighters, as they swayed to and fro, overturning goblets and benches. It soon became clear who was to be the victor. A great wound sprang open in the creature's shoulder; he broke away from Beowulf, leaving his arm in the warrior's grasp. Then he fled from the hall, wounded to death, and with the blood streaming from him he returned to his dwelling in the fen.

Morning came. The news had quickly spread, and from far and near men came to hear of the marvel that had taken place. A crowd gathered before the great door of the palace, above which Beowulf had nailed the hideous claw of the creature, still dripping with blood.

At once Hrothgar gave orders that all men should assemble in the great hall. When they were gathered, the old prince rose from his seat and spoke.

"Great Beowulf, only yesterday you beheld in us a nation plunged in grief; now, thanks to you, our evil enemy has at last been overcome. No thanks of mine can enough show my gratitude. From now onward, look upon yourself as my son."

Then treasure and rich ornaments were brought in, and laid before Beowulf and his followers. The day passed in feasting and revelry, and it really seemed as though peace and safety had returned once more to the Danish king and his people.

Night came; they sank to rest, each man seeking his own couch. They did not know that a still greater evil was in store for them. As they slept, there approached silently across the moor another monster, a

wolfish creature with long, wild hair: the mother of Grendel. She came on with huge strides, burning to avenge the death of her son. She entered the hall; there was no one to stop her. The Danes, awaking, saw her bending over one of their couches, where slept an old grey-haired warrior. They grasped their swords and bucklers and started up in terror. A moment later she was gone, carrying the old warrior with her.

Beowulf had been given a bed for the night in another part of the building, so he did not hear of the visit of Grendel's mother till the morning. When the news was brought to him he hurried at once into Hrothgar's presence.

He found the old prince in tears. "Aschere, one of my dearest comrades, has been carried off," he said. "Such has been the vengeance of Grendel's mother—a monster even more to be feared than her son."

Beowulf made answer: "Sorrow not, wise warrior. This is not a time for grief but for vengeance. Show me the tracks of the monster, and I promise that she shall not escape me, even if I have to pursue her over mountains, through forests, under the earth, or in the depths of the water."

Hrothgar sprang to his feet, thanking God that Beowulf was ready once more to help him in his need. Steeds were quickly prepared, and with Hrothgar and Beowulf at their head a large party of Danes and Geats set out in the track of Grendel's mother. They followed the trail of blood through fields and over rocky cliffs, and reached at last the edge of the lake where the she-monster had her home. The water below them was stained and troubled. There, by the lake-side, they came upon Aschere's head.

It was a wild place where they now found themselves. Strange dragons swam slowly across the surface of the lake, and on the rocky headlands the warriors could see other fearful monsters. At the sound of the battle-horn they sprang into the water. One of these creatures Beowulf shot with his bow before it could escape. The men speedily thrust their spears into its sides and drew it up on land.

Beowulf now clad himself in a mail-shirt of steel rings—a shirt so closely woven that no blade could pierce it. Then he turned to Hrothgar and spoke a few simple words of farewell.

"Hrothgar, I am ready for the adventure that I promised to undertake. If I do not return, I beg you not to forget my followers and comrades, but to be a father to them in my stead. This day I shall either achieve what I set out to do, or death will carry me off."

Then, without more ado, he grasped his sword Hrunting and sprang into the water.

Down below the surface of the lake, Grendel's mother had perceived that a man was invading her home. She lost no time, but reached out at once towards him with her greedy claws, and seized him in such a way that he could not use his weapon. She bore him to the bottom of the lake. A few moments later he found himself in a lofty hall, built out of reach of the water, and lit by a fire at one end. By the light of the fire Beowulf could see the wolfish face of the monster. She released him, and in a flash he had drawn his sword and rushed upon her. But it soon became clear to him that the sword could not pierce her hide, and he cast it away, deciding to trust to his strength alone. He seized her in his mighty grip, caught hold of her hair

with both hands, and bore her down to the floor of the hall. At the same moment he fell backwards and she fell on top of him.

In a moment she had seated herself astride his body, and had drawn her gleaming, broad-edged knife. At last, she thought, she could take revenge for her son's death. The knife struck; but it caught in Beowulf's steel shirt, and would not pierce his flesh. In the pause which followed, Beowulf slipped quickly from beneath her, and once more stood up on his feet.

Glancing round the hall, he caught sight of a pile of weapons which lay glittering on the floor. Amongst these was a huge sword, much larger than Hrunting, wrought by giants in olden times. This he seized by the hilt, and heavy as it was, he whirled it above his head. It struck the she-monster in the neck; the blade entered, and broke her neck-bone. She fell down on the floor, and with blood-stained blade Beowulf stood over her body.

As soon as he was sure she was dead, he turned to examine the hall. There was a vast pile of treasure there, but he did not touch it; he went straight to where he saw the body of Grendel, and with the sword he hewed off its head. Then, with the weapon in one hand and the head in the other, he made his way back along the hall, and so out into the water, up to the surface of the lake.

There was great joy amongst the Geats when they saw their leader appear. All the Danes had long since given him up for dead, especially when they saw the water covered with blood and foam; and they had gone back with Hrothgar to the Hall of the Hart. But the Geats had waited, for they felt sure that their leader would return.

It needed four men to bear back the head of Grendel on a spear to Hrothgar's hall. Beowulf went with them, carrying the hilt of the sword he had found beneath the lake. The blade had by now burned away, melted by the fierce blood of Grendel and his mother. Yet even the gold hilt that remained, carved with twisted snakes and other strange markings, was rare and wonderful to behold.

Now Beowulf stood before Hrothgar. "Look," said he, "I have brought you, O Hrothgar, these spoils of battle—this ancient sword hilt wrought by giants, and the head of Grendel your enemy. I could do nothing with Hrunting in the fight, and it would have gone ill with me if I had not happened to see amongst the other treasures in the she-monster's hall, this marvellous old sword that you now behold. With it I slew her. I promise you that, from now onward, you shall sleep in peace in your own hall, safe from all the harm that has so long threatened you."

Hrothgar and the Danes overwhelmed Beowulf with thanks. A high feast was prepared in Beowulf's honour; he sat on a couch near his host, and received from him further costly gifts, weapons and ornaments, all studded thickly with precious gems. The revelry continued till a late hour, and that night no fearful monster came to trouble their rest.

The next day, with long farewells to Hrothgar and his people, Beowulf and his companions set sail in their ship on the return journey to their own country. With them they bore the many rich treasures they had received from the grateful Danish prince. It was not till many years later that the Danes saw Beowulf again, when after the death of Hrothgar they chose Beowulf to rule over them. But that is another story.



THE WOOING OF OLWEN

(Prince Kilhugh, a nephew of King Arthur, had heard much about the beauty of Olwen, the daughter of the Chief of the Giants. He made up his mind to win her as his bride, and set out, with six other knights of Arthur's court, to find the giant's castle. On their way they came to the house of Custennin, a herdsman, who said that the giant's daughter passed that way every day, and promised to ask her in, to talk with Kilhugh.)

CUSTENNIN left the cottage, and Kilhugh waited impatiently with the other knights for his return. Presently he came, followed closely by Olwen. She was dressed in a robe of flame-coloured gold, set with emeralds and rubies, and other gems of great value. More yellow was her hair than the flower of the broom, and her skin was whiter than the foam of the wave; and fairer were her hands and fingers than the blossoms of the wood anemone amidst the spray of the meadow fountain. The eye of the trained hawk, the glance of the falcon was not brighter than hers. Her throat was more snowy than the breast of the swan; her cheek was redder than the reddest roses. Whoever beheld her was filled with love. Four white clovers sprang up wherever she trod.

Olwen of the White Footprints stepped into the house and took a seat on the bench, next to Kilhugh. As soon as he looked at her he knew who she was.

"Sweet maiden," said he, "I have always loved you, even though I have never seen you till now. Leave the

castle and come away with me. You do not know how long I have loved you."

"I cannot do that," she answered, "for I have promised my father faithfully that I will not go without his permission. There is a prophecy that my wedding day will be the day of his death, so you will understand that he is not anxious for me to marry. However, I will give you some advice, if you will listen to it. Go to my father, and do everything that he demands: then you will win me. But if you fail to do the smallest thing he asks of you, then you will certainly lose me. You will be lucky, indeed, if you get away with your life."

"I will not fail to do exactly as you say," said Kilhugh, "if only I get inside your father's castle."

"Then good-bye, and Heaven help you," said Olwen, and she returned to her home.

No sooner had she departed than the knights held a consultation, and they decided to go to the castle that same night, and force their way into the presence of the Chief of the Giants. The night was very dark, and there was neither moon nor stars; but the seven comrades found their way quite easily, for they had only to follow the white clovers which had sprung up where Olwen's feet had pressed.

Now the Chief of the Giants never allowed visitors to his castle if he could help it. He had nine warders at his gate, and nine fierce dogs to guard the entrance to the castle. But the warriors approached so silently that not one of the dogs barked, and they were able to kill them all without a sound. Then they came to the nine warders, stationed at the gateway. Sword in hand, they rushed upon them, and the warders sank down to earth without a cry or groan. So the seven

comrades unbolted and unbarred the outer gate, crossed the courtyard and approached the doorway of the great hall. They opened it and entered.

There sat the Chief of the Giants upon his throne. He was indeed frightful to look at. His eyebrows had grown so long that they had fallen over his eyes, and he was taller and stouter than three ordinary giants. On a table by his side lay three poisoned arrows.

The seven comrades greeted him politely. He blinked a little, and scowled back at them.

"Who are you, and where do you come from?" he asked.

"We have been sent here by King Arthur," they replied. "We have come to ask you for the hand of your daughter, Olwen, for Kilhugh, the son of Kilydd."

"Where are my varlets and slaves?" roared the giant. "Raise up my two eyebrows, and let me see what sort of a son-in-law Arthur has sent me."

They brought great wooden props and lifted his eyebrows, and the eyes beneath glowered fiercely on Kilhugh.

"Come again to-morrow," he said, "and I will give you my answer."

The seven comrades thanked him and prepared to go; but as they were leaving the hall the giant seized one of his poisoned darts and flung it after them. Bedivere caught it, and threw it back with so true an aim that it wounded the giant badly in the knee. "Ouch! What a discourteous son-in-law!" he cried. "The poison hurts like the sting of a gad-fly. No ointment can be found to cure such a wound: I shall be lame for the rest of my life. Woe to the smith who forged the weapon! Woe to the anvil where it was shaped!"

But the warriors had returned to Custennin's cottage.

There they spent the remainder of the night in slumber, but they were up at peep of dawn. They hastened to clothe themselves in their richest attire, and then they returned to the hall of the giant.

"Great Chief of the Giants," they cried. "Give us your daughter, whom we have come to find, and we will give you in return gifts of gold and jewellery. If you will not do this willingly we will force you to do it."

The giant answered: "Her four great-grandmothers and her four great-grandfathers are still alive, and I can do nothing in this matter without consulting them first. Come again later, and I will give you my answer."

"Very well," they answered, "we will go and have breakfast."

As they went he caught hold of a second poisoned dart and threw it after them. But Merlin caught it, and flung it back at the giant. It struck him in the chest, and pierced so deep that the point came out of his back.

"Ouch! What a fierce son-in-law!" he groaned. "The hard steel hurts like the bite of a horse-leech. Never again shall I climb a hill without being short of breath. What pains I shall have in my lungs! How often I shall hate the sight of food!"

But the comrades had gone to their breakfast.

Before midday they paid another visit to the castle. As soon as the Chief of the Giants heard them coming he shouted: "Do not dare to throw another dart at me, or I will kill every one of you! Where are my varlets and slaves? Raise my eyebrows with props, so that I can see what sort of a son-in-law Arthur has sent me."

As the servants did so, he snatched up the third poisoned dart and hurled it at the comrades. But Kilhugh caught it, and sent it back with such force that it struck the giant in one of his eyes and came out at the back of his head. "Ouch!" he cried. "An ill-mannered son-in-law! Never will my sight be good again. Whenever I walk against the wind my eyes will be cold; sometimes my head will be hot and heavy, and I shall be troubled with dizziness whenever the new moon shines. The poisoned steel cuts like the bite of a mad dog!"

But the warriors had returned to their dinner.

On the following morning the seven comrades went once more to the palace. Standing in the great hall they cried out: "Throw no more darts at us, great Chief of the Giants, if you do not want to suffer worse than you have suffered already." And Kilhugh cried: "Give me the maiden, or prepare to meet your death!"

"Where is the knight who wishes to marry my daughter?" asked the giant.

They placed a chair for Kilhugh, face to face with him, and the Chief of the Giants glared at the young man. Then he said:

"So you are the man who wants to marry my daughter?"

"I am," said the prince.

"Promise to deal with me justly and fairly," said the giant, "and I will promise to deal justly and fairly with you. When you have brought me everything I ask, then Olwen shall be your bride."

"I promise to deal fairly and justly with you," said Kilhugh. "What is it you want me to bring?"

"First of all," he said, "do you see that high hill

over there?" He pointed with his right hand out of the window.

"I do," said the knight.

"Good," returned the giant. "I want you to have that hill plucked up by the roots. The land where it stands must be ploughed and sown, and the seed ripened in a single day. With the corn I shall make bread and beer for my daughter's wedding-feast. But take care—the land must be ploughed, sown and reaped between sunrise and sunset of the same day."

"That will not cost me much trouble," said Kilhugh, "though you think it will be so difficult. Is there anything more?"

"If you think that is easy," said the giant, "I shall demand something that will give you a little more trouble. This land will be so rugged that no one will be able to plough it except Amatheon, the son of Don. Now Amatheon will not help you of his own free will, and no power of yours can make him."

"That will be easy, too," said Kilhugh cheerfully. "Is there anything more?"

The giant chose another task, but Kilhugh was as certain as before that it would give him no difficulty. Then another, and another; till no less than forty tasks had been given to the young knight to perform before he could hope for Olwen as his bride. "You will have hard labour to do all these things," chuckled the giant. "Your days will be full of toil, your nights full of unrest; but unless you do them all, you shall never marry my daughter."

But Kilhugh answered: "I have knights, and huntsmen, and horses, and hounds, and Arthur for my kinsman. He will help me perform all these tasks, and I shall win your daughter for my bride. And on that

day, if the prophecy is true, you shall lose your life."

"Then go forth and try," said the giant. "And while you are busy trying to perform these miracles, I will ask from you neither food nor clothing for my daughter, though she is your betrothed. When you have done all these things, then Olwen shall be your wife."

With these words still sounding in their ears, Kilhugh and his companions rode forth from the castle, resolved to lose no time, but to set to work at once on the first of the forty tasks.



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

ABRAHAM and his wife Sarah had for many years been settled in their home in the land of Haran. Then, one night, the voice of God spoke to Abraham in his sleep. "Come, Abraham," said the voice, "take down your tents, gather together your flocks and herds, prepare your servants, and leave this country for a new land to which I shall lead you. I will give you this land for your own, and your sons and grandsons shall inherit it after your death."

The following morning Abraham told the dream to his wife. Now Abraham was already an old man, and he had no children at all; so neither he nor his wife could quite understand how their descendants should inhabit some strange, new country. "But the God whom I serve has commanded me to go," said Abraham. "We must pack up our goods at once."

Their friends and neighbours were very surprised when they heard that Abraham was soon to go away. "What! An old man like Abraham?" said one. And another: "Better stay here among his kinsmen than go wandering off, nobody knows where!" "There are worse pastures than these," added a third, "and so Abraham will find before long." But none of them knew the real reasons for Abraham's going.

Abraham and his wife set off on their long journey, taking their servants and goods with them. They did not know where to find the promised country, but from time to time the voice of God encouraged them. "You see these stars?" the voice would say to Abraham at night. "Your children's children shall be

more in number than these." And in the day-time the voice would whisper to him: "Can you count the sands of the desert? No more will men be able to count your descendants and heirs."

During these long, weary wanderings, their son Isaac was born. There was great joy in Abraham's household, and both his mother and father were very proud of the new baby. "Take heart," said Abraham to his wife. "We have a child now, and part of God's promise to us has come true. Soon, perhaps, we shall find the land which he is to give us."

Isaac grew steadily, day by day, until he was old enough to run about outside the tents in the sunlight. His mother grew tender-eyed as she watched him romping to and fro, tripping over the tent pegs, getting in the way of the patient animals, and trying to help the servants grind corn. As he grew taller and stronger he was able to help lead the flock to field, and often he watched with round, solemn eyes, while his father chopped wood and built an altar, to make the offering of a lamb to God. He learnt all about God's promise to his father, and wondered much how he and his father could hope to become the founders of a great nation.

But God had one more trial waiting for Abraham. Before he would give him the promised country, he wanted to make sure that Abraham trusted him in everything, and was prepared to do exactly what he was told. So the voice of God spoke to him again, saying: "Abraham, my servant!"

"Lord, here I am," answered Abraham, "always ready for your commands."

"Then listen," said the voice. "I want you to sacrifice to me your son Isaac. Rise up early to-

morrow morning and take him with you to the land of Moriah. Build an altar on the mountain you will see there, and let Isaac be the burnt offering."

"I will do as you command," said Abraham, but the tears sprang to his eyes as he thought of losing his beloved boy. Still, he did not think of disobeying the order. He told his wife that he was about to go for a week's journey, and that he would take Isaac with him.

"Take good care of him, then," said Sarah. And Abraham promised with a heavy heart.

The next morning the whole household rose early. Isaac was very excited when he heard that he was going on a journey with his father. Abraham called two young men and told them to saddle an ass; then he went outside to chop wood.

"What is the wood for, father?" asked Isaac.

"For a sacrifice, my son," said Abraham briefly, and Isaac asked no more.

"Run now and say good-bye to your mother," said the old man, and Isaac went to do as he was bidden.

"Good-bye, mother," he said. "I'll soon be back."

Isaac was very joyful through the whole of that three days' journey to Moriah. His father watched him as he ran here and there, his curls falling loosely over his brown shoulders, and thought he had never seen a more handsome boy. All the while Isaac plied his father with questions. "Where are we going, father? Shall I be able to hunt the mountain goats? Won't mother be pleased to hear of our adventures when we get back?"

Those three days were long and cruel for Abraham. At last, however, the party reached the mountain of which God had spoken, and Abraham said to the young men: "Stay here and look after the ass. I and my

son will go up the mountain side and offer a sacrifice. We will soon be back."

Then he got Isaac to carry the wood, and he himself took a torch to light the fire, and a knife to kill the victim. As they climbed, Abraham's heart almost failed him as he thought of what he had to do. But Isaac was rather puzzled, and at last he called out to his father:

"Father, wait a minute."

"Well, my son?"

"Father, we have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

"God will provide a lamb for the burnt offering, my boy," said Abraham sadly, and he toiled upwards as before.

Some way up the mountain side, they came upon a suitable spot for the sacrifice. Slowly, Abraham built an altar, as God had directed. Piece by piece he set the wood in position, and then he called Isaac over to him.

"But, father, you're crying! Why, father?"

The old man did not answer. He seized hold of the lad and bound him fast. Then he lifted him from the ground and placed him on the pile of wood.

The boy's eyes, half pleading, half reproachful, did not leave Abraham's face. But he made no cry or complaint. Perhaps he guessed what his father was about to do, and thought, like him, that it was God's will. Abraham made sure that the torch was burning close at hand; then he fingered the point of his knife a moment, and raised it to strike.

Before he could do so, a voice spoke quite near him.

"Abraham, my servant!"

"I am ready, Lord. I wait for your commands."

"Do not lay your hand on the lad; untie him and let him go. Now I know that you are a true servant, who will not hesitate to do my bidding. I am satisfied."

The voice ceased. Abraham looked round and saw behind him a ram caught by his horns in the bushes. He unbound Isaac from the altar—you may be sure the lad was glad to be released—and tied the ram in his place. This he offered in Isaac's stead as a burnt offering to God.

Then they went back to the place where they had left the ass, and journeyed home joyfully together, to where Sarah was waiting for them.

And from that day onward, all went well with Abraham. In due course he settled in the new and fertile land he had been promised, and there founded the first home of what was to be a mighty nation.

TWO TALES OF COUNT ROLAND

I

ROLAND AND THE ROBBER KNIGHT

ONE day the Emperor Charlemagne heard of a robber knight who lived in the heart of the dark and gloomy forest of the Ardennes, in the south-east of that part of Europe which is now known as Belgium.

Set in the middle of this knight's shield was a priceless jewel.

The Emperor called together all the bravest knights of his Court. He commanded them to ride forth alone, taking one page as escort, and not to return until they had found and vanquished the robber knight.

When they found him they were to challenge him honourably, as true knights should, and thus win the jewel by conquering him in fair fight.

On a certain day which Charlemagne named, all were to return to the Emperor's palace, whether they had succeeded in their quest or not. Then, beginning with the lowest in rank, each was to tell a truthful story of his adventures.

So all the knights rode away to the forest, which they hunted from end to end. Amongst them went a knight called Milon, accompanied by his son Roland, who was then about fifteen years of age. Roland was to act as page and armour-bearer to his father.

Many days went by, and Milon had not found the robber knight, though he had searched every forest hiding-place that he knew. At last, one day, when they had ridden further than usual in the hot sun, he was so

tired as to be unable to keep in the saddle any longer.

Dismounting, he called to Roland to help him take off his heavy armour. Then, laying himself down under a tree to sleep, Milon bade the boy keep watch while his father rested.

For a while Roland watched carefully, as he had been told to do. But soon he began to be tired of sitting there by his sleeping father. He was young and restless, not used to being still for many minutes at a time.

Presently his gaze fell on his father's armour lying by his side.

" What if I should wear it and ride off myself to find the robber knight! " he thought.

No sooner thought than done, was Roland's motto. Carefully, so as not to awake his father, he put on the heavy armour. Then springing on his horse, he rode off deeper into the forest in search of any adventures that might come.

He had not ridden far when round a turn of the path he saw a horseman coming to meet him. As the stranger approached, Roland found that he was a giant in size, tall, and very strong.

With beating heart, the lad saw, also, the glimmer of a beautiful jewel that was set in the very centre of the knight's shield. It was indeed the robber knight whom all the nobles of Charlemagne's Court were seeking!

But never in all his life was Roland afraid. When the robber knight shouted his challenge to fight, the lad, laying his lance in rest, charged so bravely that he struck his enemy from his horse to the ground.

A terrible battle followed on foot. The two circled round each other, seeking an opportunity to end the

fight. But at last the young strength of Roland wore down the older man, and the robber knight fell dying on the grass.

Roland stooped, and wrenched the jewel from the dead man's shield. Hiding it beneath his clothes, he rode back to his father, who was still sleeping.

Hastily doffing the armour, he cleaned it to take away all the traces of the fight.

Soon after, Milon awoke, and began again to seek the robber knight with the wondrous jewel.

Suddenly he saw a body lying beneath a tree. Cantering over to it, he found it was a knight in full armour who had been overcome in some recent combat.

By the dead man's side was a shield with a hole in the centre. Milon saw that something had been torn violently away from the shield.

"Alas!" he said to Roland. "We are too late. This is the body of the robber knight. One of my comrades has conquered him and won the jewel."

Sadly he rode back to Charlemagne's Court, in order to be present to tell his story on the day appointed.

When the time came, the great Emperor mounted his throne to the music of a flourish of trumpets.

One after the other the knights appeared before him and told the story of their adventures. Behind each of them followed an armour-bearer holding his master's shield. Each told how he had found the robber knight slain, and the jewel gone.

Last of all came Milon. But, as he made his way to the throne, Roland came behind with glowing face, bearing proudly his father's shield, in the centre of which shone the precious jewel.

As they saw the jewel, all the knights started and whispered together. When they heard Milon tell how

he, too, had found the robber dead, and the jewel gone, they all laughed aloud, not believing what he said.

Milon could not understand the shout of laughing unbelief with which his story was greeted. But, turning round, he saw, with amazement, that right in the centre of his own shield was the jewel of which he had been speaking!

He stood there dumb with bewilderment, glancing helplessly at the shield. Charlemagne saw that he did not know how the jewel had come there, so turning to Roland, he bade the lad tell what he knew.

Thus questioned, Roland related how he himself had met and slain the robber knight.

So pleased was the Emperor with the boy's great bravery that, young though he was, he dubbed Roland knight in the presence of all his Court, and bade him take his place amongst the Paladins of the Empire.

II

HOW ROLAND DIED

AFTER Charlemagne had thrust the Saracens out of France, he led an army into Spain to punish Marsilius, the king of the country, because he had sided with the Saracens in the war.

Marsilius was compelled to submit, and pay tribute to the Emperor. He sent a great embassy to Charlemagne, offering allegiance and bringing many presents.

Lions, bears, swift-footed hounds, seven hundred camels, as well as falcons, mules, and gold were amongst his offerings. Fifty chariots were needed to carry everything to Charlemagne's Court.

Ten messengers accompanied the gifts, riding on white mules which were furnished with gold reins and silver saddles. Bearing olive branches in their hands, at length they came into the Emperor's presence.

Charlemagne was resting with his army in the field after the siege of a great city called Cordova, which he had just captured. He had fifteen thousand warriors with him, and his twelve Peers or Paladins.

The messengers of Marsilius saw the great King of France sitting on a gold throne beneath a tree. He was stately and majestic in appearance, with a long, flowing white beard. All around him were his nobles, some playing cards, others fencing.

Bowing before Charlemagne, the ambassadors made their tidings known. Marsilius declared that he was willing to become a Christian and pay tribute, if the Emperor would leave Spain and return to France.

But the Emperor, who was a far-seeing man, distrusted the smooth-spoken foreigners.

"Your king is my greatest enemy," he said, "how can I trust his words?"

"He will give you hostages," replied the spokesman. "Twenty of our noblest youths shall be sent to you, amongst whom shall be my own son."

That night the messengers were feasted in a great tent set up beneath the trees, and all was gaiety. In the morning Charlemagne called his twelve Peers to council beneath a pine-tree.

Roland was there, and his brother-in-arms, Oliver. The great Archbishop Turpin was also present, while in the background hovered a knight called Gan, who was destined by his treachery to prove the undoing of his friends.

When all had come, the Emperor repeated the

message which the ambassadors of Marsilius had brought.

"He is willing to become a Christian and pay tribute," he said. "Do you think he can be trusted?"

The Peers looked at each other in doubt.

Said Roland:

"Fair sire, it is madness to trust him. He has betrayed us before. Let us rather fight him to the end, and avenge our dead comrades."

Gan hated Roland, and never lost an opportunity of opposing him. Now, when everyone else was silent, he spoke.

"Sire, Roland is wrong. Follow up the advantage you have gained. If Marsilius offers to hold Spain as your vassal, it were foolish to reject such terms."

From behind came another voice. It was the oldest man in the army speaking.

"Count Gan's advice is wise, sire. Marsilius lies at your mercy; he has lost everything. Send one of your barons to arrange terms of peace and end this war."

This advice pleased everyone. A murmur ran round the council: "The Duke Naimés has spoken well."

At length after much discussion, it was decided that Gan should be the Emperor's messenger to Marsilius.

Gan, however, did not want to go. Roland had been urging Charlemagne to choose him, and Gan thought it was a plot on the part of his enemy to send him to his death.

"Come here," said the Emperor to him, "and take this glove and staff, the tokens of your authority to treat as my ambassador."

"Nay, sire," replied Gan, with anger. "This is Roland's work, for which I will never forgive him. You do but send me to my death—to perish as

did the other ambassadors who went to Marsilius."

"You are angry without just cause," replied Charlemagne. "You shall go, since it is my will. Take this message to Marsilius. He must become my vassal and be baptized. Half of Spain is his. The other half I give to Count Roland. Carry with you this letter, sealed with my royal seal, and give it to none but Marsilius himself."

So speaking, the Emperor held out his right-hand glove to Gan. But, as the knight did not reach to take it quickly enough, it fell to the ground.

"Ah," cried all the Peers, "that is an evil omen! No good comes to us from this embassy."

But Gan rode away, and shortly overtook the ambassadors of Marsilius, who had delayed their journey to travel with him.

The crafty Moor who had acted as spokesman for the ambassadors, soon read Gan's thoughts. Suddenly he whispered to the knight:

"Do you hate Roland? Then be revenged on him. Deliver him to us, and King Marsilius will give you a great reward."

Gan was horrified at first, and refused to hear more. But long before they reached their journey's end, he had been on by his companion's ceaseless argument. When at length he came to the Court of King Marsilius it was agreed that Roland should be betrayed.

Brought into the presence of the Moorish king, Gan bravely delivered his master's message.

"You shall become a Christian, and Charles will graciously give you one half of Spain; the other half he means to bestow upon Roland. If you refuse, he will take you prisoner, sack your city, and give you over to a shameful death."

The anger of Marsilius at hearing this insulting speech was so great that, springing to his feet, he grasped his javelin to throw at the messenger. But his nobles restrained him, and stayed the quarrel.

After a few days, Marsilius and Gan understood each other. One day they sat together in a garden, in the midst of which played a bright, sparkling fountain. The water was so clear that everything round about was reflected in it like a mirror.

As they sat and talked, Gan looked into the water. There he saw every expression that passed across the king's face. Marsilius, in his turn, watched Gan while he spoke to him. Each man guided his words by what he saw of the other's face in the fountain!

Said Marsilius:

"How many injuries has your Emperor done me! He wishes to take half my kingdom from me, and give it to Roland. Now, if that ambitious peer were dead, perhaps good men might get their just rights."

Gan heaved a sigh. Then, looking Marsilius squarely in the face, he replied:

"All is arranged! Roland shall die! He will come to your frontier with but a small force to receive the tribute. When you meet him, have your whole army secretly with you, and surround him. Charlemagne will be in the mountains unable to help. It will be the end of your enemy and mine."

Scarcely had he spoken when a darkness came over the sky, which had been clear a moment before. A storm of thunder and lightning shook the garden; a laurel was split in two, and the tree under which Gan was sitting dropped one of its branches upon his head.

It was an omen of evil import for the traitor knight! Gan rode back to Charlemagne. He delivered the

keys of Marsilius's great town of Saragossa, and told a false story excusing the absence of the king himself.

"Let the Emperor send Roland with a small force," he said, "to collect the tribute, while the main army stays behind."

"Thank Heaven!" cried the Emperor. "You have done well, Sir Gan, and I will reward you."

Meanwhile, Marsilius had brought no less than three armies into the pass of Roncesvalles, where the tribute was to be collected. These were to fall on Roland, one after the other, and overwhelm him by weight of numbers.

So Roland, with only twenty thousand men, rode into the gloomy pass between the mountains. The light grew less and less as they followed the narrow path that twisted its way through the frowning rocks.

Suddenly there rose a great cry on the silence. Out from behind the rocks came man after man of the enemy. Brandishing swords and daggers, they rushed upon the unsuspecting Franks.

"This is Gan's work!" bitterly cried Sir Oliver, who had ridden with his friend. "We are betrayed, but we will sell our lives dearly. Sound your magic horn, Roland," he went on. "The Emperor will hear it and hasten to our help."

"Heaven forbid," replied Roland, "that it should ever be sung by minstrels that I asked for help from my king in battle against these heathen!"

Amongst the knights was the saintly Archbishop Turpin. Spurring his horse, he rode to the top of a small hill, and called to the army to gather round so that he might bless them before they died.

The knights dismounted, and knelt before the archbishop, who blessed and absolved them all. For

penance for the sins they had wrought he bade them strike hard against the heathen.

Then Oliver cried to the host: "Nobles and lords, ride on against the foe and yield not." Shouting their war-cry, "Montjoie! Montjoie!" they spurred against the enemy.

The battle that day was long and deadly. Moors and Franks fought each other in a close *mêlée*. The sound of the rattling of blows on armour was terrible in the narrow mountain valley.

Each of the knights did great deeds. Roland slew the nephew of Marsilius, and all others of the Franks wrought much harm to the infidels.

At length the Moors broke and fled, leaving the Franks the masters of the field. But the victors were in a sorry plight; many of those who were not dead were wounded, and had hardly strength to stand.

Their rest was short. Before they had finished binding up their wounds, the second army was launched upon them by Marsilius. A hundred thousand men came against the wearied Franks, in columns of fifty thousand at a time.

"Soldiers of the Lord!" cried Archbishop Turpin as he watched, "be valiant and steadfast, for you shall win this day the crowns of Paradise."

So the battle was joined again, and the handful of Franks fought a hopeless fight for their lives.

Soon the knights fell in scores before the fresh strength of the newly arrived Moors: but the others fought on fiercely, and at length the second host of the infidels fled like the first.

But of all the Franks, there were now only sixty left alive, including Roland, Oliver, and Archbishop Turpin.

Now came the third pagan army. As they charged down the pass, Roland cried to Oliver:

"Comrade, I will blow my war-horn. Charles, our master, will hear it and come to our aid."

"Nay," urged Oliver, "to sound it now is shameful. It will disgrace our kinsmen all their days."

"But the battle goes against us," replied Roland. "Comrade, I shall sound my horn."

"It is cowardly to do so," declared Oliver with anger. "You would not sound it when I urged it."

Archbishop Turpin heard them quarrelling and rode up to end the dispute.

"Brave knights," he said, "it is true the horn will not save our lives. But it will be better to sound it, that Charles, our lord, may arrive to bury our bodies and avenge us."

So at last Roland put the horn to his lips and blew a loud blast that echoed at least thirty leagues away.

The Emperor Charlemagne heard it and started.

"Hark!" he cried. "Roland is in battle."

"Nay," said the traitor Gan, "'tis but a fancy. Had any but the king said it, it would have been a lie."

A second time Roland blew the horn. Cried the Emperor:

"That is Roland's horn! If he were not fighting for his life, he would not sound it."

But Gan said:

"There is no fight; Roland is too great a knight to call for help. He is hunting and halloaing on the chase."

A third time the echoes of the horn came down the mountain passes.

This time the sound was faint, as though Roland's strength had nearly gone. But Charlemagne heard.

"Sire," cried one of his knights, "Roland must be in some great danger. He has been betrayed. Let us ride to his rescue."

Calling to his men, the Emperor commanded them :
 "Take the traitor Gan, and put him safe in prison."

Seizing Gan, they chained him hand and foot, and cast him into a sorry dungeon dug out of the earth, where he lay in great misery, guarded day and night.

Fast as they could the army marched forward, praying that they would find Roland alive.

But Roland and his friends had met their doom. The third Moorish army had come upon the little exhausted band that was all that was left of the Franks.

Roland rushed upon them, wielding his sword and doing mighty deeds; but this time it was all in vain.

King Marsilius was mortally wounded, and fled in panic, while his only son was stricken to the ground.

But at length only Roland, Oliver, and Archbishop Turpin were left, while against them were arrayed fifty thousand Moors.

Oliver fell, pierced through by a lance. Turpin received a wound, and lay dying upon the ground.

Roland fought on with broken armour, wounded again and again. In a pause of the terrible fight, he lifted his horn to his lips and sounded a feeble blast.

Far off, Charlemagne heard it.

"Lords," he cried, "by the sound of that horn Roland lies at the door of death. Ride faster, and let our trumpets sound, to token our coming."

At once sixty thousand trumpets sounded. The heathen army heard the blast echoing among the mountains, and cried:

"It is Charlemagne; the great war-lord is coming! Let us slay Roland before he comes, or the war will

begin again, and our country will be taken from us."

Four hundred of them rushed upon Roland at once. He charged them alone and they fled for their lives. But casting darts as they retreated, they killed the hero's war-horse, and pierced his armour.

Flinging himself to the ground under a pine-tree, his sword beneath him, Roland prayed God to have mercy upon him for his sins. Thus died the greatest of all the peers of France.

Soon after, the Emperor's army came galloping out of the mountains, to find the dead lying thickly all over the valley. They had come too late!

Gan was put to death, but his treachery had led the most gallant knights in France to doom.

J. CROWLESMITH.

TIL EULENSPIEGEL'S MERRY PRANKS

IN the town of Herdellem there lived a rich merchant. One morning, while he was walking through his fields, he saw a youth lying idly on the grass. A lanky-looking fellow he was, with shabby clothes and a long, solemn face. The merchant sauntered up to him, and asked his name, and why he was idling there when everybody else was at work.

"My name is Til Eulenspiegel," answered the youth. "As for work, I have none. I am a cook who has lost his master."

"A cook!" said the merchant. "That's good! You're the very man I'm needing!"

"My master was a cook, too," went on Eulenspiegel.

"How's that? You were cook to a cook?"

"Yes, sir. I was a kitchen-boy."

The merchant smiled when he heard this. "Well, if you come along with me," he said, "I will turn you into a real cook, and give you good wages into the bargain. In any case, there's no harm in giving you a try; my wife is always quarrelling with her cooks."

"Cheerful news," thought Eulenspiegel, but he said nothing.

"Come along, then," went on the merchant. "Let us go off to my garden and gather herbs to boil with the young spring chickens, for I am having a big party tomorrow, and I want everything to be of the best."

"You can rely on me," said Eulenspiegel, and they went off together to the merchant's house.

"What's this? Another servant?" said the mer-

chant's wife to her husband when she saw them coming. "I suppose you think we have more food than we know what to do with!"

"Don't fret yourself, my dear," rejoined the merchant. "This is the very man we want. Come with me, lad," he went on to Eulenspiegel, "and help me fetch in the meat for to-morrow."

They went down to the meat market, and bought two huge pieces of meat. One was for boiling, and the other was for roasting on a spit over the fire. "When you cook these to-morrow," said the merchant, "be sure to put on the boiling piece pretty early, so that it may have a long time to cook. As for the roast, keep it some distance from the flames and don't let it get too hot, or it will singe and burn."

"Very good, master," said Til Eulenspiegel. "I will do exactly as you say."

The next day he put the boiling joint on early, as he had been told to do; but the beef he stuck on a spit and placed in the cellar, hanging between two barrels of beer. Before the guests had all assembled, the merchant came to the kitchen to see that the meal was ready. (His wife was far too grand a lady ever to come into the kitchen at all.) "Well now," he inquired, "is everything ready?"

"Everything is cooked," answered Eulenspiegel, "except the roast beef."

"Everything but the roast beef!" exclaimed the merchant. "And what has happened to that?"

"It is on a spit in the cellar," answered the new cook. "You told me to keep it some distance from the fire, so that it shouldn't get hot, and I put it in the coolest place I could find. You didn't say when you wanted it cooked."

Meanwhile the guests had begun to arrive, and the merchant decided that the best thing he could do would be to tell them the whole story. Most of them laughed when they heard it, but the merchant's wife burst out in anger.

"I told you so!" she cried. "The wretch! Get rid of him at once!"

"I'd better not do that," said the merchant. "I am going to Gollai to-morrow, and I shall need him to drive me there. But I promise you that when we are safe back home he shall be dismissed."

"Thank goodness for that!" said his wife.

Then the master called Eulenspiegel and said: "To-morrow I am going with the parson as far as Gollai. See that the coach is ready in the morning, and take care that it is well greased and oiled. I don't want any accidents by the way."

"I will see to it, master," said the youth. And when all the family was in bed, he proceeded to grease not only the hubs and axles, but also the rest of the coach, inside and out. As a result, when the merchant and parson entered the coach the next morning, and Eulenspiegel suddenly drove off, they both slipped and fell to the floor. They staggered into their seats, but the seats were greasy, too, and with every jolt of the coach they were shot from one end to the other. At last the merchant called out in a great passion:

"Stop! Stop, you idiot! What have you been doing to the coach?"

At that moment a farmer went by, carrying a load of straw in a waggon. The parson and the merchant got out and bought some of the straw. With this they managed to clean the floor and seat of their carriage.

The merchant, looking up from his labours, caught sight of Eulenspiegel's grinning face.

"Go hang yourself, villain!" he shouted, enraged. "Off to the gallows with you!"

Hearing this, Til Eulenspiegel whipped up the horses and drove away at a rapid pace, keeping a sharp lookout for a suitable gallows. At last he espied one by the roadside. Here he pulled up, got off the driving seat, and began to unharness the horses.

"Now what are you up to?" screamed the merchant.

"This is where you get off, master," answered Eulenspiegel.

"Where I get off! What do you mean, rascal?"

"Didn't you tell me to drive to the gallows? I thought you wanted me to set you down there."

The merchant and the priest looked upwards, and saw the gibbet above their heads. The merchant, losing the remains of his patience, cried out: "Drive straight on in front of you, and don't stop till I tell you to!"

Eulenspiegel did so. Straight in front of them there happened to be a muddy pond, and into this they drove headlong. Of course, the coach got stuck; Eulenspiegel flogged away at the horses, and with a sudden cracking and rending the coach came in two. On went Eulenspiegel with the horses and the front wheels, leaving the merchant and parson stuck in the mud with the hind part of the coach.

The merchant was furious. He leapt down into the mud, waded through it, and began to run after Eulenspiegel. It took him some time to overtake him; when he did, he began to flog the youth soundly, and would no doubt have injured him if the parson had not come up and stopped the quarrel in time. After a good deal of struggling, they managed to fix the parts

of the coach together, and the rest of the journey was finished in peace.

"Well," said the merchant's wife when he returned, "how did your journey go? How are you feeling now?"

"I'm feeling fine," said the merchant, "now I'm back home again." Then he called Eulenspiegel and said: "Eat and drink to your heart's content to-night, for you won't get another good meal for many a long day. To-morrow you quit my house." And the next morning, before he went out, he said again: "Eat a good breakfast, take all you want, but don't let me find you here when I come home from church."

So, while the merchant was at church with all his family, Eulenspiegel got a large waggon, and loaded it with all the goods he could lay hands on: food stores, household furniture, silver plate, ornaments and jewellery. He was just driving away with his load of goods, when he met the merchant coming home from church.

"Ha! My honest cook! What little surprise are you preparing for me now?"

"I'm only doing what I was told to do," said Eulenspiegel. "You told me to take all I wanted and quit the house!"

"Leave those things where they are!" commanded the merchant. "As for you, either you leave the town this instant, or I'll have you whipped out of the place!"

"Just my luck!" grumbled Eulenspiegel. "I do everything my master orders me to, and yet I can't live in peace!"

But he left the town quickly all the same, and from what I can hear he never showed his face there again.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

ORPHEUS loved two things, his lute and the sweet maiden Eurydice. With his lute he made such wonderful music that everything listened in delight. All the wild animals left their lairs, and crept about his knee, the birds flew around his head, and the trees bent nearer to listen. Even the rocks softened when they heard Orpheus playing on his lute.

Eurydice loved his music too. When he came to woo her, she listened to his songs with joy. Soon she promised to marry him, and when the wedding day came the woods rang with happiness and mirth.

But alas for Eurydice! As she danced at her bridal feast, she trod upon a snake in the grass. It struck at her in anger, and bit her foot. The maiden cried out in pain, and Orpheus ran to her.

But he could do nothing to help her. The snake was poisonous, and before night came, Eurydice was dead.

Then Orpheus was wild with grief. He went among the woods and hills, playing such mournful music on his lute that everything wept to hear him. He could not live without Eurydice, and at last he went to Jupiter, begging him to let him go down to the Under-world, where the gloomy King Pluto reigned.

"There I shall see my lovely Eurydice!" he said. "Let me go, oh Jupiter, for life is nothing to me without her."

"Go then," said Jupiter, "but the way is strewn with perils, Orpheus. Think twice before you venture into Pluto's dread kingdom."

Orpheus turned to go, his heart lighter for the first

time since Eurydice's death. He made his way to the black river Styx, and begged the ferryman, Charon, to ferry him across to the Underworld.

At first Charon would not, but when Orpheus began to play on his lute, he consented. Then, with sweet music in his ears, old Charon for the first time rowed a living man across the dark river.

Orpheus landed on the opposite shore. He went to the entrance of Pluto's kingdom, and there, lying by the mouth of the cave that led to the Underworld, was Cerberus, a fierce, three-headed monster. His duty it was to guard the entrance, and to see that nothing living passed in, and to forbid any dead spirit to pass out.

When he saw Orpheus, he made as if he would spring upon him and devour him. But the lute-player played such sad and enchanting music that the terrible dog lay down and let him pass by in peace.

Through the caves Orpheus went, still playing on his lute. The spirits in the Underworld heard the sweet music, and came crowding round him to listen. Orpheus paid no heed to any of them. He had come to seek his beloved Eurydice, and her only did he desire.

Soon he passed by the wicked daughters of Danaus, who had killed their husbands on their wedding-night. For this they were punished by being forced to fill a bottomless cask. This they could not do, but if they paused for a moment, a lash fell upon their shoulders, and they hurried to fetch more water. When they heard the lovely music of Orpheus, they rested in their hopeless task, and for a few moments tasted delight again.

Near by was the wicked King Tantalus. He stood up to his chin in pure, clear water, and over his head

hung a luscious bunch of sweet grapes. The king was tormented by a fearful hunger and thirst, but whenever he stooped to drink the water, it fled away from him, and if he put up his hand to the grapes, they swung out of his reach.

As Orpheus passed by, Tantalus for the first time forgot his hunger and thirst, and turned to listen to the lovely music. But Orpheus did not see him. Always he strained his eyes for Eurydice, striving to catch a glimpse of her sweet form among the shadows.

Soon the lute-player came to a steep hill, where the evil king Sisyphus was condemned to roll a great stone up to the top. But when he had just reached the summit the stone always slipped from his grasp, and rolled to the bottom. Then Sisyphus had to climb down and roll it up again.

When Orpheus came by, Sisyphus paused in his dismal task, and looked round in amazement to hear such sweet sounds in the Underworld. He sat down upon his stone, and for a little while forgot his woes in listening to the music. But Orpheus passed him without heeding. On and on he went until he came to the very throne of Pluto.

There sat the dark king, and by his side was the lovely Proserpina, her bright face shining out from the shadows.

"Why do you come here, mortal?" demanded Pluto. "Do you not know that only the dead pass through the portals of my kingdom?"

"Oh Pluto," said Orpheus, "I come to find my sweet love, Eurydice. Without her there is no life for me. You took her from me whilst she was too young—we had but just begun our happiness together. Give her back to me again, for I love her. Do you not

remember, oh Pluto, how you fetched Proserpina from the world above? Have you forgotten the love you felt for her then? I, in my turn, would fetch my love Eurydice from this world below. Oh, give her to me once again, or keep me here with you, for I will not live without her!"

As Pluto and Proserpina listened to the mournful song of Orpheus, tears sprang to their eyes. All the listening spirits sighed dolefully, and the air was full of soft groans. Proserpina leaned towards Pluto and whispered beseechingly to him.

Pluto nodded, and then turned to Orpheus.

"Your wish is granted," he said. "Go back the way you came, mortal, and Eurydice shall follow behind you. But speak not on the way, nor pause. Do not look behind you, for if your eyes fall upon Eurydice before you reach the upper air, she will be lost to you for ever!"

Then Orpheus, a great gladness in his heart, turned away from Pluto's throne. He swept the strings of his lute, and the music that came forth from them was like laughter itself—a strange sound in that dismal kingdom. He passed upwards towards the faint glimmer of light that showed the entrance to the upper world.

Behind him he heard the following steps of his love Eurydice. He heard her soft breathing, and joy filled his heart. He spoke no word, and made no pause. On he went and on, and ever behind him came the patter of Eurydice's small feet.

Then, just as he came near the outlet to the world of sunshine and life, Orpheus wondered whether the time she had spent in the Underworld had changed Eurydice in any way. Would she look pale and wan, would some of her sweet beauty have fled?

Without thinking, the eager lover turned to gaze on the face of Eurydice—but no sooner had he turned than she sighed dolefully, and murmuring, “Farewell, a last farewell!” vanished from before his eyes. Down the long, dark passages she fled and Orpheus stretched his arms out to the empty air.

Mad with grief, he tried to follow her, but he could not. He was led back to the world above, and there he wandered about with his lute, making such unhappy music that even the rocks wept to hear it.

At last he died, and then his spirit raced to meet Eurydice’s. Gladly they embraced, and then, happy at last, wandered together in the lovely Elysian Fields, never more to be parted one from the other.

ENID BLYTON.

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE

THE Count of Beaucaire was at war with his neighbour, the Count of Valence, and seemed likely to get the worst of it, for he was old and frail, and near the end of his days. He had one son, called Aucassin, whom he was always urging to go out and defend their lands against the enemy. But it was no good urging, for the youth was so full of love for a young Saracen maiden, Nicolette, that he took no interest in his knighthood, or the tournament, or the field of battle, or the sports usual to a young man of his age.

His father tried to reason with him. "Nicolette," said he, "is a captive brought to France from a foreign land, and although she has been baptuzed and brought up as a Christian, she is not a suitable wife for you. Why, my son, you could have the daughter of a king or a noble if you wished!"

His arguments had no effect on the young man, and at last the Count of Beaucaire decided that the only thing to do was to remove Nicolette from Aucassin's reach. So he went to the old viscount who was Nicolette's guardian, and said: "Send away Nicolette from this country. For love of her, Aucassin will perform no knightly deeds, although my enemies are at my door night and day. Let me tell you this," he went on, his anger rising at every word. "If I ever again set eyes on the girl I will burn her alive. As for you, you had better look out for yourself!"

The viscount was in terror of his life, and immediately promised to do what the other asked. "See that you

do," said the Count of Beaucaire, "or great evil will befall you."

So the viscount at once sent for Nicolette, and had her locked up in a room at the top of a tower, with a little bread and wine for food, and an old woman to keep her company. Nicolette was very miserable. She wept continually and cried: "Dear Aucassin, it is because I love you that I have been locked up here. But I swear by the Son of Mary that I will not stay here longer than I can help."

Soon the news spread through all the countryside that Nicolette had disappeared. Some said that she had fled away, others that she had been murdered by the Count of Beaucaire. Aucassin was in great distress when he heard these rumours, and going to the viscount he said: "What have you done with Nicolette, whom I love more than anyone else in the world?"

"Pray, leave well alone," answered the viscount. "Nicolette must marry a man of her own rank; you yourself ought to marry a princess. What would you gain if you were to take Nicolette against your father's will? You would lose all chance of Paradise after death, and for your wickedness your soul would burn for ever in hell."

"What do I care about Paradise?" answered Aucassin. "To Paradise go all the folk with long faces, the priests, the lame, and the beggars with tattered clothing. I would much rather go to hell. There I should find the people who enjoyed themselves on earth, the singers and minstrels, the princes and courtly dames."

"You are wasting your time," replied the viscount. "If your father were to know you were here, he would

burn both Nicolette and me. And as for you, you had better look out for yourself!"

When he returned to his father's castle, Aucassin found that their enemy, the Count of Valence, was preparing to make an attack. The Count of Beaucaire was in despair. "My son," he said, "put on your armour, I beg you; mount your horse and lead our men against the enemy."

At first Aucassin refused, as he had done many times before. Then an idea occurred to him. "Father," he said, "if I go out and lead your men, and defend your castle, will you permit me to see Nicolette for a short while? Will you let me exchange a few words with her, and kiss her just once?"

"I will," said his father. "I give you my word."

So Aucassin mounted his horse and went out to the battle. He fought with such success that before long he had captured the Count of Valence, and had led him by the nose into his father's presence.

"Father," said he, "this war has lasted twenty years, and now, it seems, I have brought it to an end."

"Son," replied his father, "you stand boasting too long. Go out and win glory for yourself in the fight."

"Come, father," said Aucassin impatiently, "don't start preaching. Keep your promise."

"What promise?" asked his father.

"Why, father, have you forgotten so soon! You promised me that if I led your men against the enemy you would let me speak to my sweet friend Nicolette."

"I?" said his father. "May God forsake me if I keep such a promise! If I had her here I would burn her alive. And as for you, you had better look out for yourself!"

"Is that your last word?" asked Aucassin.

"Yes, so help me God!"

"Indeed," said Aucassin, "it grieves me when a man of your age tells lies."

The Count of Beaucaire now saw plainly that he could not keep his son's thoughts from Nicolette by refusing to stand by his promise. He made up his mind to put Aucassin in prison till he should come to his senses. The soldiers were ordered to seize him and place him in an underground cellar of the castle, where a strong guard was kept upon him. There Aucassin wept day and night, thinking that he would never see his sweet Nicolette again.

It was now summer time, and the month of May, when the days are warm and long and clear, and the nights calm and serene. Nicolette, lying in bed in her prison chamber, saw the moon shining brightly through the window, and heard the nightingale in the garden, and thought of Aucassin whom she loved so much. She made up her mind to escape that very night, and waiting till the old woman was asleep, she got out of bed, put on her silken dress, and tied the bedclothes together to make a rope. This she fastened to the middle bar of the window. She climbed out cautiously, and slid inch by inch to the ground. Now she lifted the hem of her dress with both hands, and trod carefully through the dewy grass.

She was indeed lovely to look upon. Her hair was golden, and hung in little curls; her features were dainty and well-shaped; her lips were redder than cherries, or roses in June; her waist was so slender that you could have enclosed it with your two hands; and the marguerites that grew where she walked seemed almost black, so white were her limbs!

Hurrying forward in the moonlight, she came at last

to the castle of Beaucaire. As she crept up under the walls of the tower, she heard Aucassin complaining to himself and breaking the silence with his cries. There was a chink in the wall; putting her lips close to it she called to him.

"Dear Aucassin," she said, "do not grieve for me. Your father hates me; it is far better for me to go away from this country, so that you may never see me again." Then she cut off a lock of her hair and passed it to him through the chink.

Aucassin kissed it and wept bitterly. "Dear sweet love," said he, "if you go from me I shall certainly die."

"Oh," said Nicolette, "I did not know that you loved me so much as that; although, in truth, I love you even more."

Meanwhile, the meeting between Aucassin and Nicolette had been observed by the watchman of the tower. He had also noticed that a party of the count's soldiers was coming that way, and knew that if they saw Nicolette they would kill her. He was a kind-hearted man, and wishing to save Nicolette from danger he called to her, and warned her to hurry off. Nicolette bade her lover a hasty farewell, and ran away in the opposite direction to the soldiers. Soon she had left the town behind her, and had plunged into a deep forest.

For the rest of the night she slept under a bush, and did not awake till it was past midday. She rose up, and hearing voices not far off she moved cautiously to the edge of the glade, and came out on an open space by the bank of a stream. Here she saw a number of shepherds, setting out their meal on the grass.

"Good friends," said she, "God keep you!"

"And God keep you, too," answered one who was a little more forward than the others.

"Do you know Aucassin, the son of the count?" she asked them.

"Yes, we know him well."

"Then go and tell him that there is a creature in this forest for which he would give all he possesses. Urge him to come quickly and hunt for it."

"Nay, that is a fairy story," answered the first speaker. "There is no such creature in this forest; and you yourself are a fairy, and we want nothing to do with you."

"But please do it," she begged, "for the creature has such power that it can heal him of his sickness. Here are five silver pieces. Tell him also that unless he comes to search for the creature in three days, he will never be well again."

"We will take the money," they answered, "but we will not go and seek him. If he comes here to the forest we will tell him what you say."

Nicolette thanked them and went on her way. She set out through the wood, and travelled all day till she came to a spot where seven paths met. Here she rested, and after a while built a little arbour of leaves and grass and blossoms, so that if Aucassin should follow her he would know that she had already been that way. "Maybe," thought she, "he will lie down here for my sake, and rest a little." Then she withdrew from the place, and watched to see if Aucassin would come.

Meanwhile, rumours spread through the countryside that Nicolette had once more disappeared. Some said that she had fled away, others that she had been murdered by the Count of Beaucaire. When this

news came to Aucassin he grieved much, but his father was very pleased. He released his son from prison, and made a great feast in the hope of comforting him.

While the feast was at its height, Aucassin, full of thoughts about his love, wandered away from guests without their noticing. He went to the stable, saddled his horse, and rode slowly into the forest. He had not gone very far before he heard voices, and a little further he came upon some shepherds, talking about a lady they had met. Aucassin's thoughts flew to Nicolette, and he could not help wonder if she also had been that way. He went up to the shepherds.

"Good friends," said he, "God keep you!"

"And God keep you, too," answered the one who was more forward than the others.

"Would you be so good as to repeat what you were saying just now?" asked Aucassin.

At first they were not very ready to do this, but Aucassin took from his purse some silver pieces, and the sight of them soon loosened the shepherds' tongues.

"While we were setting out our meal on the hill," they said, "a lady came and spoke to us. She asked if we knew Aucassin, the son of the count. She told us to let him know that there was a creature in this forest that could heal him of his sickness, if he would come and hunt for it. But we told her that there was no such creature. She was a fairy, and we would have nothing to do with her."

Aucassin knew at once that this must be Nicolette. So bidding the shepherds farewell, he turned his horse, and went on his way more hopefully.

As he travelled he said to himself: "Ah, Nicolette,

my love, I have come to the woods to hunt, but not for deer or boar. The only tracks I follow are those that will lead me to you." All day he rode, and after darkness had fallen he came to a place where seven paths met. By the light of the moon he saw a little arbour built of leaves and grass and blossoms. "Why," he said, "it is Nicolette, my sweet friend, who has built this arbour, and for her sake I will spend the night here."

He got down from his horse, but in doing so he fell to the earth, and struck his shoulder against a stone. In spite of the pain he managed to tether his horse to a tree, and then, lying down on the ground, he crawled into the arbour. Nicolette who had been watching in the woods not far off, now crept out of her hiding-place, and came running to the arbour. She crept in, threw her arms round Aucassin's neck, and kissed him.

"Dear love," she cried, "how glad I am to find you at last!"

"And you, sweetheart," he said, "I am even more glad to find you. But look," he went on, "I was in great pain a few moments ago, and now I feel nothing because you are with me."

She felt his shoulder all over till she had found the wound. Then she made a dressing of leaves and flowers, and laid them on the shoulder, and Aucassin was at once cured.

"Now," said she, "Aucassin, my sweet love, what shall we do? If your father searches the forest to-morrow, and finds me here, he will surely kill me."

"Indeed," replied Aucassin, "I should be very grieved at that. But they shall never take you if I can help it."

"Then we must depart at once," said she.

They left the bower and untethered Aucassin's horse from the tree. He mounted into the saddle, and gently lifted her up before him. Then they rode away into the forest, and by daybreak they had left their enemies behind them for ever.

FEDERIGO'S FALCON

FEDERIGO was a knight of Florence, well known for his deeds in the battlefield and the tournament, and also extremely rich. He fell in love with a young widow of the same city, a lady called Monna Giovanna who was both rich and beautiful. It was the custom in those days for a knight to show his love for a lady by giving a great number of feasts and tournaments in her honour, and this Federigo did in honour of Monna Giovanna. But it was of no use. The lady would not take any notice of Federigo, and at last he had given so many feasts, and spent so much money, that he was reduced to beggary. To pay his debts Federigo had to sell his fine house, his horses and his stables, so that at last he had only two things left: a small farm in the country, and a falcon which he loved dearly.

So Federigo gave up the life of the town and went to live alone on his farm. Here his pleasures were of the simplest. He spent most of his time out in the fields with his falcon, who was a very clever bird, and famous through all the land. Not far from Federigo's farm was the large country estate where Monna Giovanna was living at the time with her little son. The boy paid many visits to Federigo, and being very fond of hunting and field sports he soon became much attached to the falcon. He would have liked to possess it, but he could not well ask the knight to part with a bird of which he was so fond, especially as it was the only pleasure he had left in the world. So the boy had to be content to play with it from time to time, and to take it out hunting.

Now one day the little boy was suddenly taken ill. His mother stayed by his bedside night and day, doing everything she could think of to make him better, but in spite of her care he got gradually worse.

"Tell me, dear," she said at last, "isn't there anything I can bring you to make you better?"

The boy shook his head. "Nothing," he said.

"Are you quite sure? Is there nothing in the world that would give you a little pleasure?"

The boy pondered. "If," he said at last, "you were to bring me Federigo's falcon, then perhaps I should get well."

"Federigo's falcon!" thought Monna Giovanna. She had heard that Federigo loved it best of all things in the world next to herself. But she had never encouraged Federigo's love, nor even so much as spoken to him, so she did not think she could humble herself by asking such a favour from him. Yet she loved her son dearly, and was anxious to do what he wished. So she said: "My dear boy, don't worry any more. I will go to-morrow morning and get the falcon for you."

The next morning, with another lady for a companion, Monna Giovanna set out to Federigo's farm. It was not a suitable day to go out hawking, so Federigo was at home, in his garden. He was very surprised indeed when he heard that two ladies wished to see him. He went to the gate and greeted Monna Giovanna joyfully.

"You are welcome, madam," he said. "This is a great honour for me and my poor house."

"Federigo," said the lady, "I know I have not treated you very well in the past, and I have come to make up for it now. With your permission, I and my

companion will be your guests at dinner to-day."

"Madam," said Federigo, "I cannot remember your ever having treated me badly; but I do know that I would willingly lose my whole fortune over again, just for the honour of having you to dinner with me."

Then he invited the ladies into the house, and afterwards led them out into the garden. Having no one else to introduce them to, he asked the farmer's wife to entertain them while he went to see about dinner. But when he looked into his larder he could almost have wept tears of despair, for there was nothing fit for a noble lady to eat. How he longed for the days when he had given so many feasts in Monna Giovanna's honour! Now at last, when she had come as his guest, he had nothing at all to feast her with.

As he glanced round the room, his eyes fell upon the falcon that he loved so well. It fluttered across to him, perched affectionately on his wrist, and looked up with beady eyes into his face. "It is fat," he thought. "It would make a dish fit for any lady." And choking back his tears he seized it, wrung its neck, plucked its feathers and set it to roast for dinner.

Dinner time came: the falcon was set before the guests, and they ate it without knowing what kind of bird it was. At last Monna Giovanna decided that it was time to make her plea to Federigo. So after they had chatted awhile she said:

"When you remember how cruel I have been to you, you will be rather surprised that I dare to ask you a favour. But if you had ever had a son whom you loved as much as I love mine, then I think you would forgive me for my boldness. Let me explain myself. My little son, whom you know so well, is extremely ill, and the only thing that is likely to make him better is

the gift of something that belongs to you. I am speaking of a thing that is very dear to you: your beautiful falcon. I know I ought to be ashamed to ask you for it; but if you were to be the means of saving my son's life I should never, never forget it."

For a few moments Federigo could not speak for astonishment; then he sat down, put his head in his hands and began to weep. The lady stood by quietly, saying to herself: "I was afraid it would be like this. He cannot bear the thought of parting with the falcon, even for my sake. He will never give it up, and my son must die."

At last Federigo looked up and spoke.

"Madam," he said, "your words have plunged me into the deepest grief. I would do anything in the world for you, and yet I cannot do this one thing that you ask me."

"I was afraid you would not agree to it," said Monna Giovanna. "Everyone knows how dear the falcon is to you."

"Madam, you do not understand," said the young knight. "When I heard that you had honoured my poor farm by coming to dine with me, I was in despair because I had no food good enough to offer you. As I looked round I saw my falcon perched near by. He had grown quite fat lately, and I thought that perhaps, if he were well roasted, he might make a dish which I need not be ashamed to set before you. See, here are his feathers, beak and claws."

Federigo fetched the remains of the poor bird and showed them to the ladies. Monna Giovanna shook her head when she saw them.

"How could you do such a thing!" she said. "To kill a fine bird like that for a lady's dinner!" But to

herself she said: "How noble of him! Shall I ever forget it?"

After a while she bade goodbye to Federigo, and thanking him for the great honour he had shown her she went away, very miserable.

A few days afterwards her son died, and she spent a long time mourning for him.

Now, when her husband had died, he had left all his money to his son; but as the boy was dead, the money became the property of Monna Giovanna. It was always the custom in those days that a childless widow should marry again, so that her estate might come under the control of a man. Soon the relatives of Monna Giovanna came to her and said: "You must marry again. You are still young, and very rich. Come now, choose a husband and settle down happily with him."

"Very well, then," she said, "if I must marry again, I shall choose Federigo for my husband. He is the noblest man I know."

"What!" cried all her relatives. "Federigo! Why, he has no estates of his own! He is no better than a beggar!"

"That is true," said Monna Giovanna. "But I would sooner marry because a man needs my money, than because my money needs a man. I will marry Federigo, and no one else."

And so she did; and the marriage turned out well, for they spent many long years together in peace and happiness.

THE MIRACLE OF THE CID

IN the whole history of the Spanish people, no man was more feared in his life-time than the famous Diaz de Bivar, whom men called the Cid. Many a marvellous tale is told of the courage and bravery of this warrior, but none so marvellous as that of the strange power which he wielded after death.

After a life of successful exploits, the Cid knew that his days were near an end. Even as he lay on his deathbed, he heard that one of his enemies was approaching with a large army. The Cid knew that he would never again ride out to battle alive: but there seemed no reason why he should not ride out to battle dead. "After my death, embalm my body," he said to his wife. "Wash it with rose-water and anoint it with myrrh and balsam. Then mount me on my horse and let me ride at the head of the army. But do not let anyone know I am no longer alive."

They did as he said. After his death they embalmed his body so as to preserve it; then they armed him, mounted him on his horse, and sent him forth at the head of the army! The very sight of him leading his forces struck terror into the hearts of the enemy. They faltered, and at last turned and fled.

After the battle, his wife said: "His body shall not be put into a coffin as long as it remains fresh and handsome." She sent for an ivory chair, and they placed the Cid in it. His left hand held the scabbard of his famous sword, Tizona; his right hand clasped the strings of his mantle. The ivory chair was set up in the

chapel of an old monastery, so that everyone might come and gaze at the great hero.

For ten years the Cid remained in the ivory chair, with no alteration in his appearance except that his clothes were once changed. Every year there was a great feast on the anniversary of his death, and people came from miles around to gaze on the warrior as he sat, dark and handsome, with his long beard combed out neatly before him. On the feast day, food and clothes were given to the poor, and it was the custom of an abbot who had known the Cid well during his lifetime, to preach a sermon to the people in the open space before the monastery.

It was at the seventh anniversary of the Cid's death that a strange thing happened. The people had come, as usual, to gaze on the Cid's body; and then they had passed out into the open to hear the sermon of the abbot. But one old Jew remained in the church, and stared for a long time at the Cid's body. He looked from right to left, and saw that no one was watching him. Then he murmured:

"So this is the mighty Cid! They say that during all his lifetime no one ever dared to pluck him by the beard. I wonder what he would do if someone pulled it now."

The Jew reached out his hand to pull the Cid's beard; but before he could touch it, the Cid's right hand suddenly let fall the strings of his mantle, grasped his sword and drew it six inches out of the scabbard!

Two burning eyes glared down upon the unhappy Jew.

That was enough. The Jew let out a great cry of fear, and fell backwards on the floor. All the people outside heard it and came running in. They found the

Jew lying on his back before the Cid, but no sound came from his lips. He was quite unconscious.

The people turned their eyes to the Cid: and you can imagine their astonishment and horror when they saw him sitting there, lifeless and motionless as usual, but with his right hand on the hilt of his sword.

Then they sprinkled water on the Jew's face, and he soon came to himself. The abbot asked him: "Tell us what you have seen." At this, the Jew fell on his knees and told everything, and asked that they would baptize him and make him a Christian. The abbot did as he asked, and they gave the Jew the name of Diego Gil.

All the people rejoiced when they heard and saw what had happened. They said that the power of God must have entered into the Cid. As for Diego Gil he would not leave the monastery, but stayed there till the day of his death doing homage to the Cid's body.



SAMSON THE MIGHTY

IN the days when the Israelites were ruled over by their enemies, the Philistines, there lived a young man called Samson; and it happened that when he came of an age to marry, he fell in love with one of the Philistine maidens.

It was the custom then that a young man's parents should make the arrangements for their son's marriage. So Samson went to his father and said: "Father, I have fallen in love with a Philistine maiden, and she lives down at Timnath. Please go to her parents and ask if I may have her for my wife."

His parents were surprised at his asking this. "What!" they exclaimed. "Are there no maidens beautiful enough among the Israelites? Must you go and choose a wife from the daughters of our enemies?"

But Samson said: "Do get her for me, for indeed I love her dearly."

In the end his parents agreed, and some days later they all set out on their journey to the city where the girl lived. As they travelled, Samson wandered apart from his father and mother, thinking happy thoughts about the maiden he was going to marry. As he sauntered along, a young lion appeared suddenly from among the bushes, and came roaring towards him. Samson leapt to meet it, and felt a miraculous strength come over him. He seized the lion in his powerful grasp, and tore it limb from limb with his bare hands. Then he hurried forward to rejoin his parents, but he told them nothing about the lion.

The visit to the maiden and her family was in every

way a success. It was arranged that Samson and his parents should come on a second visit, and that there should be a great marriage feast before he took his bride away.

So the day came when Samson and his mother and father set out on a second journey to Timnath. On the way, Samson suddenly remembered the lion which he had killed, and wandering apart from the rest of the party he came to the place where he had left the carcass. Inside the lion he found a swarm of bees and a honeycomb. He took the honeycomb and ate some of it, and carried the rest back to his parents; but he did not tell them where he had got the comb.

They arrived at Timnath, and a great feast was prepared, which was to last for seven days. To this feast came not only the bride and her family, but also thirty youths from among the Philistines. On the first day, while they were feasting, Samson said to them: "I am going to give you a problem to solve, and I will allow you seven days in which to think out the answer. If you solve it by the end of seven days, then I will give you thirty suits of clothing, one for each man; but if you do not solve it, then you must give me thirty suits of clothing. Is that agreed?"

They all agreed to this proposal.

"Then here is the problem," said Samson. "*Out of the eater came forth food; out of the strong came forth sweetness.* Explain what this means."

Now Samson was thinking all the while of the strong lion, who was indeed an eater while alive, but from whom, when dead, he had taken the honeycomb. The Philistines could not possibly think of this explanation; so on the morning of the last day of the feast they went to Samson's young wife, and said:

"Go to your husband and persuade him to tell you the answer to this problem, and then come secretly and tell it to us. If you do not do this, we will set fire to your father's house, and burn you both to death."

Samson's wife was terrified at this threat. She went at once to her husband and began to weep.

"You hate me!" she said fretfully. "You do not love me at all! If you did, you would not set all my friends a problem and not tell the answer to me!"

"Well," said Samson, trying to comfort her, "it is true that I haven't told you the answer, but I haven't told it to my father and mother, either."

However, she kept on begging and praying him, till at last he told her the explanation of the problem. She lost no time in passing on the answer to the Philistine youths.

On the evening of the same day, the men of the Philistines came to Samson.

"Well?" said Samson. "*Out of the eater came forth food; out of the strong came forth sweetness.* Can you explain what this means?"

The young men answered at once: "What is sweeter than honey? Or what is stronger than a lion?"

Then Samson was angry, for he guessed that his wife had helped the Philistines to give the answer. But he made up his mind to keep his word; so he went out, and exerting his great strength he killed thirty other Philistines, and gave their clothing to the thirty men to whom he had promised it. Then he went back in a rage to his own home, leaving his young wife behind him.

That was the beginning of a long quarrel between Samson and the Philistines—a quarrel which lasted many years. Samson lost no chance of vexing them

whenever he could. On one occasion he caught three hundred foxes, tied burning firebrands to their tails, and sent them in among the ripe corn of the enemy. The corn burned so fiercely that soon only the blackened stubble remained. On another occasion, when the Israelites, urged by the Philistines, tied the young man with ropes and gave him up to them, he broke his bonds as if they had been thread. Coming upon the skeleton of an ass, he seized the jawbone, and killed a thousand Philistines in one battle.

Very soon the name of Samson became famous through all the land. Everyone knew of him as a man of enormous strength, and the Philistines decided that it would be useless to try to capture him by force. They resolved to take him by trickery, but here again they had no success. At one time, when his enemies knew he was in the city of Gaza, they locked the gates in the evening and waited there till daylight, intending to kill him when he left in the morning. But it happened that Samson decided to leave the city at midnight. Coming to the gates, and finding them locked, he lifted them off their hinges and went out on his way, carrying the gates with him! He abandoned the gates at the top of a high hill, and the Philistines had hard work getting them down again.

For many years Samson continued in this way to harass his enemies, till the Philistines hated him more than ever. They knew that if only they could discover the secret of his great strength, and find a means of taking that strength away, they would easily overcome him. At last they thought of a plan by which this might be done.

Samson's wife was dead; she had been killed by the Philistines as a punishment for bringing so much

trouble upon them. In course of time Samson fell in love with another woman, a beautiful lady called Delilah. When the Philistines learnt this, they went secretly to visit Delilah.

"You are a friend of Samson," they said. "Find out from him what is the real reason for his great strength. Find out, too, if there is any rope so strong that he cannot break it. Do this, and we will give you eleven hundred silver pieces."

Delilah was tempted by the offer of so much money, and she readily agreed to try to find out Samson's secret.

One day she said to Samson : "Tell me, what is the real reason for your great strength? What sort of ropes should I have to bind you with, if I didn't want you to break them?"

"Bind me," said Samson, "with seven green vines that have not been dried, and I shall be unable to free myself."

So a little time after, Delilah brought seven green vines and asked him if, just for fun, he would let her tie him up. Samson agreed to this, and she bound him.

Now Delilah had arranged that some Philistines should be hiding in the room, waiting their chance; and as soon as he was tied tightly enough, she called out: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!"

Hearing this, he sprang up and his bonds snapped, just as a taut string snaps when it touches a flame; so the Philistines stayed hidden.

Delilah said: "You were making fun of me all the while. Come, tell the truth this time: what should I really use to tie you so that you couldn't hurt anyone?"

Samson smiled and said: "If you tie me up with

ropes that have never been used before, I shall be unable to do anyone any harm."

So a second time she bound him, and arranged to have men lying in wait, as before. But as soon as she cried: "Look out! The Philistines!" he broke the cords and started up; so she knew he had deceived her again. She tried yet a third time, and still he made fun of her, and refused to tell her what she wanted to know.

But she tormented him continually, always urging him to give up his secret, till at last he could hold out no longer, and told her the real truth. "This is the reason for my strength," he said. "No razor has ever been used on my head. If my locks were to be cut off, I should be no stronger than any other man."

Delilah was overjoyed at having discovered Samson's great secret. She went and told the Philistines at once, and they came to her, bringing the silver pieces with them. "He is asleep now," she said. "Let us go in and cut off his hair."

They did so. When Samson awoke, and saw his enemies around him, he sprang at them, intending to drive them away. But he found, to his dismay, that his strength had all passed out of him.

Then the Philistines captured him without difficulty, bound him with fetters of brass, and put out his eyes. They imprisoned him at Gaza, their chief city; and since he was unfit for other work, they set him to grind their corn. Here, in prison, his hair began to grow again.

Poor Samson might very well have ended his days in the misery of a Philistine prison; but he was destined to bring harm to his enemies once more before he died. It happened that the Philistines decided to hold a great feast; "For," they said, "our god Dagon has given our greatest enemy into our hands."

When the day of the feast came, they brought Samson from prison, and set him in the courtyard of the palace, between two pillars. These pillars held up the flat roof of the palace. On the roof were no less than three thousand men and women, who had crowded there to watch the feasting; below in the courtyard were many lords and ladies, and all the most mighty Philistines of the land.

Then Samson said to the little boy who led him: "Guide my hands, so that they can feel the pillars on which the house rests." And the boy did as Samson asked.

The laughter and merriment grew louder; the enemy feasted and drank, and began to mock at the helpless Samson. "Look at him!" they cried. "The waster of our country! The villain who slew so many of our people!"

But Samson raised his head and prayed silently to God. "O God," he said, "remember me, and strengthen me just this once, O God, so that I can be revenged on my enemies for my lost eyes."

He stretched out his hands and grasped the two pillars which supported the roof; then he spoke again. "Let me die with the Philistines!"

Suddenly he bowed himself with all his might; there was a fearful cracking and rending, a noise like thunder, and the house roared to the ground. As the roof fell in, the people fell with it; and both those on top and those beneath were crushed in the ruins. The scene was fearful to behold. Never before had so many Philistines met their death at one time.

So, too, ended Samson; but he had not died a common death. The enemies he killed that day were greater in number than all he had slain in his life before.

SIR BALIN AND THE ENCHANTED SWORD

ONCE, in days long ago, when Arthur was king, a rebel prince from North Wales raised a large army against him, and marched into England, slaying and burning as he went. The king at once summoned his knights and soldiers to Camelot Castle, to decide what was to be done. Soon after they were assembled, word was brought to the king that a lady desired to speak with him.

When she came into Arthur's presence she let fall her mantle, which was richly furred, and the king was amazed to see that she wore a huge sword at her side.

"Madam," said the king, "why do you wear that sword? It is not a suitable thing for a lady to wear."

"Alas," said the maiden, "I wear it because I cannot draw it from my girdle. Heavy as it is, I must carry this sword wherever I go, until it is drawn out by a knight who performs none but good deeds, and who has never in his life been guilty of any villainy or treason. I have already been to the court of King Rience, but I found no knight there who could draw out the sword."

Now King Rience was the very king against whom Arthur was preparing to fight, and this made him eager to succeed where his enemy had failed. So he said, "I myself will attempt to draw out the sword; not because I think myself the best knight here, but so as to set an example to the others."

Then Arthur caught hold of the sword; yet, though he pulled with all his might, he could not loosen it from the girdle.

"Sir," said the maiden, "there is no need to pull so hard, for the knight who draws out the sword shall do it without any difficulty."

Then all the knights of Arthur's court, one by one, attempted to pull out the sword, but they had no better fortune than Arthur. The maiden was very sorrowful at this, and said: "I see that there is no sinless knight amongst you, or else he would soon be able to relieve me of my burden."

Now there happened to be in Arthur's court a poor knight, very shabbily dressed, who was being kept prisoner there. This knight, Balin by name, saw all that had happened, but because he was so poorly clothed, he was ashamed to go forward with the others and attempt to draw out the sword. However, after the maiden had taken leave of Arthur and his barons, Balin ventured to go up to her.

"Maiden," he said, "permit me also to try my hand at drawing out the sword, for I feel in my heart that I can do it."

The lady, seeing this knight so poorly dressed, answered:

"Sir, there seems little chance that you should succeed, since all the others have failed. Besides, no man can draw out the sword unless he is of noble parents."

"Maybe," answered Balin. "But nobles and sinless life are not to be found in a knight's clothing, in the knight himself."

"That is so," she answered.

The maiden then allowed Balin to touch the sword, and he drew it out at once, without difficulty. Everyone in Arthur's court marvelled at this, and some of the knights were jealous; but Arthur himself said: "I have

been mistaken about Balin, and have been unjust to him. It is now proved that he is no false knight, but one of the noblest knights living."

"Now," said the maiden to Balin, "give me back the sword."

"That I will not do," answered Balin, "I mean to keep it."

"Alas," said the maiden, "I do not ask it for myself. I would save you from the misfortunes that will come to you if you keep it. For it is an enchanted sword, and the knight who wears it is doomed to kill the man he loves best on earth. The sword will also bring about his own death."

She continued to beg Balin to give her back the sword, but he laughed, and said that he would run the risk of all that might befall him. Soon afterwards the maiden departed, still grieving that Balin would not listen to her advice.

Balin then went to King Arthur, and told him that he intended to depart from the court, and go in search of adventures. The king was sorry for this; he begged Balin to stay, saying that he would make up for his past unkindness and injustice by giving him an honourable place among his knights.

"God reward your highness," answered Balin, "but go I must, and at once." So Arthur let him go, although a little displeased at his leaving the court so suddenly.

Balin then rode forth, wearing, as well as his usual sword, the weapon he had taken from the maiden. After several adventures he came to a great forest. He had hardly entered it when he espied a knight riding towards him, and he knew by the other's shield that this was his brother, Balan. Both knights dismounted,

took off their helmets, and kissed and wept for joy, for it was many long years since they had met.

"I came here to find you," said Balan, "for I heard that you had been allowed to leave Arthur's court."

"That is true," answered Balin, "but although Arthur permitted me to depart, he was displeased at my going. I would gladly do something for him, for he is the most honourable king now reigning on earth. I have a mind to attack his chief enemy, King Rience of Wales. By conquering him I shall prove my love for King Arthur."

"And I will go with you," answered Balan, "and we will help each other, as brothers ought to do."

So they travelled on together, and had not gone far before they heard news of King Rience. They were told that he would come riding through the wood that night, with sixty of his most trusty followers; so they hid themselves amongst the bushes, and prepared to surprise the enemy. Sure enough, at midnight they heard the king approaching. Balin and Balan rushed out upon him, threw him to the ground, and slew more than forty of his following, while the rest fled. They would have slain Rience, too, had he not thrown himself upon their mercy.

Without delay the two brothers set off, taking King Rience with them, and came to the gates of Arthur's court before dawn. Here they handed their captive over to the porters of the castle, and after making Rience promise that he would tell Arthur how he had been overcome, and by whom, they went off in search of new adventures.

In that way Balin was able to show King Arthur how much love he bore him, and to repay him for the courtesy he had received at his hands.

Balin and his brother Balan now separated, each following different roads. Many were the encounters of Balin, and so great were his achievements that the Knight of the Two Swords soon became famous through all the land. But his success was to be brief: a sudden disaster brought his life to an end, and fulfilled the maiden's prophecy.

One day when Balin was riding alone, he saw by the wayside a cross with writing of gold upon it. Coming a little nearer he read these words: *It is not wise for any knight to ride alone towards this castle.* Now reading this, Balin became very anxious to know what would happen if he did ride onward, so ignoring the advice, he proceeded on the same road as before.

Soon he heard a horn blown, such as is usually sounded at the death of a hunted beast. "That horn," thought Balin, "is blown for me, and I am the hunted creature; but I am not dead yet."

He rode on a little further, and came to the castle about which he had been warned. He was met by a hundred ladies and as many knights. They welcomed him courteously and led him in; and for a while he was entertained with dancing and minstrelsy. Then the chief lady of the castle said: "Knight of the Two Swords, you must now prepare to do battle with a knight who lives on an island close by. No man is allowed to pass our castle until he has fought with this knight."

"Surely," answered Balin, "it is an evil custom to permit no man to pass this way without fighting?"

"You need combat with only one knight," answered the lady. "If you win, we will let you proceed on your way."

"Well," said Balin, "since I must fight, I must. Take me to this island."

"Sir," said one of the knights in the hall. "It looks to me as though your shield is not a very good one. I pray you, take mine, which is larger, and leave your own here with me."

Balin did so, and they put him and his horse into a great boat, and carried them over a lake to an island near by.

He had landed, and had just mounted his horse, when he saw a knight dressed in red from head to foot, charging down towards him. This knight was his brother, Balan; and Balan looked at the newcomer and his two swords, and thought that it might be Balin; and then he looked at the shield, and decided that it could not be.

So they raised their spears into position, and came together at a tremendous speed. Each smote the other's shield, but such was their speed, and such their strength, that both were borne down to the ground, and lay for a moment unable to move. Balin was weary with travel, and it was Balan that rose first. He went towards his brother and smote him through the helm. Balin returned the blow, and both fell back wounded. They rose and fought again, till each had seven great wounds, enough to have killed any ordinary man. They breathed a little, and then Balin said:

"What knight are you? For I never before met any knight who could match me in strength."

Balan answered: "I am Balan, brother of Balin of the Two Swords."

"Alas," cried Balin, "that I should live to see the day!" And he fell back unconscious.

His brother crawled forward and pushed back the

helmet from his face. Then Balin awoke, and cried: "O Balan, I have slain you, and you me!"

"I knew you not!" Balan cried. "I saw your two swords, but the shield was not yours."

"That was the fault of a wretched knight at the castle, for he made me change my shield for his own. If I lived I would destroy the castle for its evil customs. But tell me, how do you come to be here?"

"It happened," answered Balan, "that I was forced to kill a knight who guarded this island, and then the folk of the castle would not let me depart, but made me fight with all the knights who came this way. And they would have done the same with you, brother, if you had managed to overcome me."

The lady of the castle now approached with her ladies and knights, and asked them why they wept over each other.

"Because we are both sons of the same mother," they answered. "Therefore we beg you to bury us both in one grave, here where our battle took place."

The lady, touched with pity, promised to grant them what they asked. All the other ladies and knights wept for sorrow when they heard the story. Shortly afterwards Balan died, and at midnight Balin followed him.

In this way, all happened as the maiden of the sword had foretold, for Balin had slain his own brother, and at the same time had met his own death.

HOW THOR WENT AMONG THE GIANTS

Thor, the god of Thunder, was one of the gods whom our English forefathers worshipped. Old legends tell us how these gods were always at war with a race of giants who dwell just beyond their own country. This story tells us how Thor, taking with him the girdle of might which made him the strongest of all living creatures, went with two companions to Utgarth, the home of the giants.

ONCE upon a time Thor set out in search of adventures, and took with him Loke and Thialfe. After a while they came to the sea. They crossed in a boat, and on the other side found themselves in a dense forest. All day long they walked in it, and at dusk they sought a shelter for the night. Presently they saw a good-sized hut with a door that took up the whole front of the building. As there were no people about, they went in, and lay down to rest. In the middle of the night they were aroused by a terrible noise. The hut shook, the ground rocked under their feet, and they felt sure that nothing but an earthquake could have caused all this commotion. They got up and looked about them, and then they noticed a little out-house on the right-hand side of the hut. Into this they crept, quaking with fear, and not one of them had another wink of sleep that night. As for Thor, he sat in the doorway, grasping his hammer in both hands, that he might be ready to hurl it at any one who tried to attack them. However, nothing else happened to disturb them, and at dawn they went outside and saw a great giant lying at a little distance from the hut. He was fast asleep and snoring,

and this was the noise that had frightened them in the night, and caused the earth to shake.

In the daylight things did not seem quite so terrible, and Thor, taking the precaution to put on his girdle of might, summoned up courage to ask the big man his name. He answered in a friendly manner:

"My name is Skrymer. As for you, I need not ask your name, for I am quite sure you are Thor. But what have you done with my glove?"

Then he stretched out his hand and picked up the hut in which the gods had spent the night; for this was the giant's glove, and its thumb was the outhouse.

Skrymer now proposed that they should all travel on together. And he said it would be better to make common stock of their provisions. So he put them all in his own bag, tied it up tightly, and threw it across his shoulders.

They now set out together, and the gods found it hard work to keep up with the giant's pace. At night-fall they took up their quarters under an oak. Skrymer said he was not hungry, and would go to sleep at once, but he gave Thor the bag and bade him get supper for his party. Thor took it and tried to undo the knots with which it was fastened, but though he put forth all his strength, he could not make the cord budge. This made him furious, for he was very hungry, and he dealt Skrymer a blow on the head with his hammer. It aroused the giant, and he muttered that a leaf must have fallen from the tree. Then he fell asleep again. Thor and Loke now gave up all hope of supper, and lay down under another oak, but they were too frightened to sleep. At midnight Skrymer was snoring so loudly that the wood re-echoed the noise. This made Thor even more angry, and he took his hammer and dealt

the giant a second blow, much harder than the first. This time the hammer made a dent in the skull, and Thor could see it sink down into the giant's head. Again Skrymer woke up, and said:

"Has an acorn fallen on my head, or is anything the matter with you, Thor?"

Then Thor said he had just woken up and was going to sleep again. But he resolved to deal Skrymer a third blow, harder than either of the others. Just before dawn, when he was sleeping more soundly than ever, Thor struck Skrymer on the temple with such force that the hammer entered right in and the handle disappeared. Then the giant sat up, and said:

"Surely there must be birds in this tree, for something hard fell on my head just now. But it is time to be off, Thor, and I will set you on the way to Utgarth, where you say you are going. There you will see plenty of men bigger than I am. And I will give you one piece of advice before we part. When you get to Utgarth be sure to demean yourselves modestly, for Utgarthloke, the king, and his men will not stand any insolence from such little fellows as you. If you cannot make up your minds to this, you had better turn back at once; but if you decide to go on, your road lies to the east. Mine is to the north, so I will bid you farewell."

Thor and his companions now continued their journey, and at midday they came to a great castle. In front was a gate, which was locked, but they contrived to squeeze in between the bars. Next they passed through an open doorway, and came to a large hall, where sat a number of giants with Utgarthloke, the king, at their head. The travellers saluted him politely, and he greeted them with a smile.

"It is not often that travellers tell true tales," said he,

"but, after all, it may be so. And yet—can this little fellow really be the thunderer Thor! Perhaps, however, your looks belie you, and you are really stronger than you seem. Anyway, tell me what skill you and your comrades boast of; for we receive no one here who is not distinguished in some way above his fellows."

Then Loke answered, "There is one thing I understand better than most people. I will undertake to eat my food faster than anyone in this hall."

"Good!" said Utgarthloke. "We will put you to the test."

Thereupon he ordered a great trough to be filled with meat and brought in. Loke was to begin eating at one end, and at the other Loge, the giant who had been chosen for this competition. They both ate as hard as they could without stopping, and they met midway. But it turned out that while Loke had eaten all the meat off the bones, Loge had consumed the bones and the trough as well. So he was declared victor.

Next Thialfe was asked what he could do. He answered that he would beat any of them at running. They went out accordingly to a field where there was a clear course for racing, and Utgarthloke called a boy named Huge, and bade him race with Thialfe. In the first heat Huge was so far ahead that he turned back at the end of the course and met Thialfe; in the second, Huge got in while Thialfe was still within an arrow's shot of the goal; and in the third, he won when Thialfe was only half-way. So the gods lost the second competition as well as the first.

Then Thor was asked what great feat he could perform to justify his reputation. He answered that he would engage to win a drinking match, no matter whom they might choose to compete with him.

Utgarthloke now ordered the great horn to be brought from which his courtiers were in the habit of drinking. He handed it to Thor, and said:

"We call a man a good drinker who empties this horn at one draught, and a tolerable one if he empties it in two; but there is not one among us who would not easily manage it in three draughts."

Thor took the horn, and examined it. It did not seem so excessively big, though it was certainly very long; and as he was extremely thirsty after his long tramp, he thought he could manage it easily enough. He took a long pull, and did not stop till his breath gave out. Then he looked into the horn, and it seemed almost at full as before. Utgarthloke said:

"Well, you certainly have not drunk much, and I should never have believed it, had any one told me that Thor was such a poor drinker; still I have no doubt you will empty it at the next draught."

Then Thor set it to his lips again. The second draught was much longer than the first, but when he looked inside there did not seem much of the ale gone, though the horn could now be moved without risk of spilling. But the giants began to mock at Thor, and to taunt him with being an empty boaster; and in a rage he seized the horn once more, and drank and drank till at last he could swallow no more, and handed it back without emptying it.

Of course the giants jeered at him now, and called him a feeble fellow; whereat he flew into a violent passion, and said they had better try his strength in some other way. Utgarthloke replied:

"Our young folks sometimes amuse themselves by lifting up my cat from the ground. It does not require much strength, and I should not have ventured to

propose such an easy feat to Thor, had I not already seen for myself that his might is far less than men say."

While he spoke a large grey cat came jumping into the hall, and Thor took hold of it and tried to raise it from the ground. But though he put out all his strength, he only managed to lift one of its paws. Then Utgarthloke said:

"This is pretty much what I expected, for the cat is a large one and Thor but a little fellow compared with our men."

At this Thor flew into a worse rage than before, and said:

"Small as I am, I will undertake to wrestle with any man among you."

"Nay," said Utgarthloke, "it would be mere child's play for the men here to wrestle with you. Send some one to fetch my old nurse, Elle. She has thrown many a man before now who was no weaker than you."

So Thor was set to wrestle with the old woman, but he had no better luck than before. For his adversary stood against all his attacks, and at last she seized hold of him and threw him on his knees.

This was the last of the competitions, and the gods had been beaten in every one. It was now late, and the giants offered their guests entertainment for the night, but they were to be off in the morning. At day-break Thor and his companions set out on their homeward journey. Utgarthloke went a little way with them, and at parting he asked Thor whether he was satisfied with the result of his journey, and whether he had met with any one stronger than himself? Thor answered in a very subdued manner, saying he feared that he had added but little to his reputation. Then the giant said with a smile:

“ Well, I will tell you the truth now that you are out of my castle, which, as long as I live, you shall never enter again, if I can help it. Indeed, I should never have let you in at all, had I had any idea of your strength, for you nearly brought a dire calamity on us. Know, then, that you have been made the victim of illusion. It was I myself who met you in the forest, and I tied up the sack of provisions with iron bands, to keep you from opening it. Afterwards you dealt me three blows with your hammer, the weakest of which would have given me my death had it hit me. Perhaps you may have noticed in my hall a great boulder with three large square dents in it. These were the marks left by your blows. I held up the rock to cover me, but you were not able to see it. And I served you in the same way in all the trials of strength. Loke consumed an enormous quantity of food, but his antagonist was Raging Fire, which can devour all things. Hugi, who raced with Thialfi, was my Thought, and no runner on earth can travel as fast. But when you drank out of the horn, and could not empty it, that was the greatest marvel of all. For the end of the horn rested in the sea, and when you get back to the coast you will find out what a mighty draught you took, for it has brought on a low tide out of season. And you performed another wonderful feat when you tried to lift the cat; indeed, if the truth must be told, we were all in terror when we saw her paw off the ground. For this was not a cat at all, but the Midgarth snake that encircles the earth. You pulled so hard that the head and tail were drawn apart, and it was nearly lifted up to the sky. As for your wrestling bout with Elle, it was no shame to be thrown by her, for there never was, nor will be, any man so strong but one day Old Age shall give him a fall.

Now go your way in peace, and it will be best for both of us not to meet again. But if you ever return to my hall, be sure I shall contrive to trick you again, as I did this time."

When Thor heard this he grew very angry, and grasped his hammer, meaning to hurl it at Utgarthloke. But he was nowhere to be seen, and when Thor would have turned back to attack the castle, that too had disappeared, and there was nothing in sight but level plains and green fields. So the Thunderer was forced to turn his steps homeward, vowing vengeance in his heart.

ALICE ZIMMERN.

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

It was Christmas time, and King Arthur was holding court at Camelot castle. Thither had come all the knights of the Round Table, together with noble lords and lovely ladies from every part of the land. For fifteen days there was feasting, for fifteen nights dancing; and when New Year's Day came, Arthur ordered a special banquet to be prepared in the great hall.

Everywhere there was merry noise and bustle. New Year's gifts were handed out and admired; loud laughter rose often from among the guests; servants ran to and fro, busy preparing the meal; and from the dais at one end of the hall, Arthur and his queen Guinevere smiled down at the company.

The king was in joyful spirits. To add to the gaiety of the day, he had taken a playful oath that he would not eat until he had seen some miraculous happening, or been told some marvellous tale of adventure. So he waited; and the first course of the banquet had hardly been served when there was a clatter of hoofs in the courtyard outside, and all eyes turned sharply towards the door. A moment later, a gigantic horseman had ridden into the hall.

The noise died away. Every eye was fixed on the newcomer. And well might they stare in amazement: for both horse and rider were a brilliant green from head to foot! The stranger's coat was green; so were his mantle and hood; his hose and shoes were of the same colour; his very skin was green. His green steed wore green harness. In one hand he carried a branch of holly; in the other he bore a huge green axe.

He glanced boldly around him.

"Which of you is the lord of this company?" he asked in a loud voice. "I have something very important to say to him."

Arthur rose and greeted the stranger courteously. "Welcome to this hall, sir. My name is Arthur; I am the lord of this castle. I pray you, come down from your horse and join us. We will ask your business later."

"Not so," replied the Green Knight. "I have not come to take part in your feasting. Nor have I come seeking a quarrel. All I ask is that you will join me in the piece of sport I shall propose to you."

"Sir Knight," said Arthur, "if it is fighting you want, you have certainly come to the right place for it."

"No, I want no fighting, I tell you," cried the Green Knight. "Why, these men around me are just beardless babes! No, what I am suggesting is no more than a little Christmas game. It is this: one of your knights shall deal me a blow with this axe, and shall receive from me a blow with the same weapon. Your knight shall be allowed the first blow. If there is any man bold enough to accept the challenge, I will take the blow from him here and now, in this hall; and I will give him a whole year before he need receive the same from me."

There was dead silence in the hall. For a long while no one spoke. Then the Green Knight laughed aloud. "What! Is this Arthur's court?" he mocked. "And is there no one here bold enough to accept my challenge?"

Hearing this, Arthur sprang to his feet in anger, and would have seized the axe from the Green Knight; but Sir Gawain, who was sitting next to the queen,

cried out: " My lord! I beg you, let *me* accept this challenge! "

For a few moments there was discussion among the knights, but in the end they all agreed that Gawain ought to be the one to undertake the adventure. So the king smiled and consented; and Gawain rose and advanced towards the Green Knight.

" Before we go further," said the Green Knight, " there are certain promises we must make. First, I must know your name."

" My name is Gawain," answered the knight. " I agree to deal you a blow, and to accept one from you in a year's time."

" And I in my turn agree to accept your blow, and to deal you one a year from now, in the place I shall tell you of later."

These promises being made, the Green Knight dismounted and walked to the middle of the hall, where he laid his locks over his head and bared his neck. Gawain gripped the axe and raised it on high; then he placed his left foot on the ground before him, took careful aim and smote with all his might. The neck was cleft through: the head fell to the floor and rolled away down the hall. Out spurted the blood on to the green hood. But the stranger leapt across the floor after the head, caught it up, and seizing the bridle of his steed sprang into the saddle. Headless, and with bleeding body, he sat his horse as though nothing had happened to him.

He held the head aloft so that all could see it. The lips opened and the mouth spoke.

" Take care, Gawain, that you keep your promise, made in this hall in the hearing of these knights. In a year's time you must journey forth till you find the

Green Chapel; and there, on New Year's Day, you must receive from me such a blow as you yourself have dealt."

Then, still carrying the head in his hand, he turned his horse and clattered out of the door.

For a few seconds there was silence still; then there broke out a buzz of conversation. Arthur himself, though he marvelled at what he had seen, turned to Guinevere and said lightly: "Dear lady, have no fear. Such wonders are fitting entertainment for Christmas time. Now I may turn to the feast with a good appetite, for I have seen a miracle, just as I vowed to do."

The weeks passed by, and each brought nearer the time when Sir Gawain must ride forth to find the Green Knight, and receive from him a blow in return for the blow he had given. When at last he set out it was autumn, and the time of the harvest moon. For many days he travelled, and wherever he went he asked if men had seen anything of a knight in green. He passed over mountains, and through woods, and under craggy cliffs. Often he was forced to fight with serpents, wolves, bears and even giants. The days became colder and colder as it drew again towards Christmas. Many a night, when stinging hail lashed the earth, Gawain slept in his armour among naked rocks. On he wandered, and still he could learn nothing as to the whereabouts of the Green Knight or the Green Chapel; and all went ill with him until, upon Christmas Eve, he came to a castle in the middle of a forest.

He drew rein before the castle gate, and called out aloud. Presently there came a gate-porter. "Good sir," said Gawain, "will you carry a message for me to the lord of this castle, and beg him to grant me a lodging for the night?"

"Willingly," answered the porter, "and I can promise you that you will be allowed to stay here as long as you please."

Servants then came out to conduct Gawain into the castle, where he was greeted in a very friendly manner by a tall and handsome knight. "You are welcome, sir," he said. "Tarry here as long as you wish. Everything that I have is yours, to do as you like with."

He led Gawain to a guest-chamber where a fire burned, gave him a suit of clothing, and afterwards conducted him to a table where a meal had been prepared. At supper, Gawain told his host that he was a knight of Arthur's court, and gave his name; hearing which the lord of the castle smiled, and seemed very pleased.

After supper the knight conducted Gawain into the presence of his fair wife—a lady more beautiful even than Guinevere, so Gawain thought. With her was another lady, an ancient dame with a hideous, wrinkled face. Both ladies welcomed him to the castle; and soon after, wearied by his long travels, Gawain retired to bed.

For three days Gawain remained at the castle, and every day there was feasting and Christmas jollity. On the morning of the fourth day, when breakfast was over, Gawain drew the lord of the castle to one side, and thanked him for his courtesy and his rich entertainment. "And now," he added, "I must be off on my travels again."

"It is a great honour to have had Gawain for my guest during the Christmas season," replied the other. "But why must you leave us so soon?"

"An important errand takes me from this castle. I have set out in search of a place that I have not the

slightest idea where to find. Tell me, sir, I beg, whether you have ever heard speak of the Green Chapel, or of the Green Knight who lives there. I have given my word to meet that knight on New Year's Day, and I would not fail if I could possibly help it."

"If that is all that is troubling you," replied his host, "you need no longer worry. The Green Chapel is no great distance from this castle. You will be able to stay here for four days longer, resting and preparing yourself for your adventure. On the first day of the year I will ride forth with you myself, and we shall be at the Green Chapel by midday."

Gawain was glad to know that his search for the Green Knight was so near its end. He agreed joyfully to stay till the New Year with the lord and lady of the castle.

They made merry all that day, and towards evening his host told Gawain that he intended to rise early on the morrow, and go out hunting. Sir Gawain was still wearied by his long journey, and said that he would not accompany the knight, but would stay at home and rest.

"It is well," said the lord of the castle. "And now I have a plan to propose. Whatever I catch when I am out hunting to-morrow I will bring home to you; and whatever you receive here at home you shall hand over to me when I return. How do you like that for a bargain?"

Gawain laughed. "Whatever you suggest, I am ready to agree to it."

The next morning the lord of the castle rose early, and set off with huntsmen, horses and hounds to the chase. Gawain remained at home, as they had planned, and while he lay resting on a couch, the lady

of the castle came softly into the room. He greeted her courteously, and she returned his greeting. They talked for a while and then, in a pleasant way, she began to make love to Gawain. "Come now," she said, "my husband and his men are miles away; let us be happy here till he returns."

Now Sir Gawain would not dishonour himself by making love to the wife of his host, nor could he be so rude as to refuse her love outright, so he answered lightly that he was quite unworthy of the love of so charming a lady. They kept up their merry conversation till it was time for the lady to leave him; but before she did so, she bent down suddenly and kissed him.

It was evening before the lord of the castle returned home. He summoned all his followers into the great hall, and shortly afterwards the ladies appeared with their maids-in-waiting. Then the knight greeted Gawain, and showed him the venison he had killed. "What do you say?" he asked jovially. "Have I earned your thanks for my skill to-day?"

"It is fine game, certainly," replied Gawain.

"And I give it all to you, Gawain. Now tell me, what have you to give me in return?"

For answer, Gawain went forward and kissed the lord of the castle.

"I am satisfied," said the other. "May I ask where you got this kiss?"

"That was not part of our bargain," answered Gawain laughing. His host laughed too, and said no more.

The next day, when her husband had departed again for the hunting field, the lady paid another visit to Gawain, and this time she gave him two kisses. Both of these Gawain passed on to his host when he

came home in the evening. Very much the same thing happened on the third day: the lady gave him three kisses, and then offered him presents as proofs of her love. First she asked him to accept a magnificent golden ring, which he refused; then she offered him a girdle of green silk to wear round his waist.

"This is no ordinary girdle," she said. "Whoever wears this is protected from all wounds and other injuries."

Gawain remembered that on the next day he would have to face the Green Knight, and receive from him the blow he had agreed to take. So he accepted the girdle.

"Now promise me," went on the lady, "that you will not show it to my husband. He would be very angry with me if he knew I had given you a present."

The knight could not very well refuse to do as she asked; and that evening, when the lord of the castle came home, Gawain gave him the three kisses, but said nothing about the girdle.

On the following morning, which was New Year's Day, Sir Gawain rose early and found the whole earth covered with snow, and snow falling still. He got into his armour, and asked the servants to see that his horse was made ready. Soon he had set out, with his host to guide him, and was on his way to the Green Chapel. The road led them up the steep sides of perilous cliffs, between high banks, and over hill-tops crowned with mist. After long riding they came to the summit of a high rock, and here the lord of the castle bade Gawain draw rein.

"You are now not far from the haunts of the Green Knight," said he. "For my part, I shall venture no further. I have heard many evil things about this

knight, and I must warn you that every man who has tried to pass this way has gone to his death. If you take my advice you will go no further, but will return with me to the castle, and make merry as before."

Gawain shook his head. "If I were to fail now I should be nothing but a coward," he said. "Whatever happens, I must go onward to the chapel and seek out the Green Knight."

"Then farewell, noble Gawain. For all the gold in the world I would not go with you."

With these words, the other turned his horse and rode back the way he had come.

Gawain now went forward alone, looking carefully to right and to left for signs of the Green Chapel. Turning a bend in the pathway he came upon a cave, overgrown with grass and weeds, and tunnelling into the side of the cliff. "If this is the Green Chapel," thought Gawain, "it must be the devil's own church!"

A voice hailed him from above, echoing loudly among the rocks. He looked up and saw the Green Knight striding down to meet him. He was dressed as he had been on the day of their first encounter, and carried the huge axe over his shoulder.

"Wait just one moment," he called down to Gawain, "and you shall have what I promised you a year ago." A minute or two later he stood beside the knight.

"You are welcome, Sir Gawain," he said. "You have kept our agreement both as to the place and the hour, like the true knight you are. Now prepare yourself to receive what I owe you."

"I shall keep my promise," replied Gawain, and having removed his helm, he bowed his head and laid bare his neck. The Green Knight raised the axe on high, and made ready to strike.

In silence Gawain awaited the blow. But glancing a little to one side he saw the sharp blade descend, and shrank a little from the axe.

The Green Knight withheld the stroke. "What!" he exclaimed. "Is this one of Arthur's knights! Can it be the renowned Sir Gawain who flinches even before the blade touches him!"

"I ask your pardon," replied Gawain. "I have flinched once: I will not do so again."

"It is well." A second time the Green Knight raised his axe, and again stopped short as the blade was about to come down. Gawain did not move; he merely said: "Strike, good sir, and have done with it! You have threatened long enough!"

"You say the truth," answered the Green Knight. "This time I shall really keep my word."

The axe descended lightly on Gawain's bare neck: it pierced the skin, and a few drops of blood ran down into the white snow. As soon as Gawain saw them he sprang nimbly aside, cast on his helm, covered himself with his shield, and drew his sword.

"Defend yourself!" he cried to the Green Knight. "I promised to take one blow of your axe: I have taken it. I am now free to fight this out with you!"

The Green Knight did not move. He remained leaning on his axe, and smiled at Gawain.

"You are too hasty, Sir Gawain," he said. "I see no cause for fighting. You have had nothing but fair treatment from my hands. You agreed to accept a blow, and you have taken it; consider yourself justly paid. The first blow I aimed at you did not touch you: that was because you kept your promise on the first evening of my return from hunting, and told me about the kiss you had received. On the second even-

ing you kept your word again: that is why I spared you the second blow. But on the third evening, when you said nothing about the green silk girdle, you were a little lacking in loyalty to your host; for that reason I gave you the blow which drew blood from you.

"For it is my own girdle you are wearing, given you by my wife. I know all about the kisses and my wife's lovemaking: I arranged it all myself. Great honour is due to you, Gawain, for your behaviour in this affair. You were never once found wanting except in the matter of the green girdle, and that was because you valued your life. Who can blame you for that?"

As he listened, Gawain slowly let his sword fall to his side. He could not look into the merry eyes of the Green Knight: his glance dropped to the ground, while a blush spread over his cheeks. Then he tore off the girdle and held it out to the knight.

"Take it back again," he said. "I was a coward to accept it."

The Green Knight laughed, and replied: "You have no need to be ashamed. Your fault was a small one; you have confessed it and received punishment. Take the green girdle for your own, to keep you in mind of this adventure. And now come back with me to the castle, and you and my wife and I will all be good friends as before."

Gawain shook his head. "I will not return with you," he said. "Give my greetings to your fair wife, and to that other lady as well. I shall return at once to Arthur's court; and I shall keep the green girdle, not for its value, but as a reminder of my fault. And now, sir, since you are the lord of the castle where I lodged, tell me, what is your name?"

"My name," answered the Green Knight, "is

Bercilak de Hautdesert, and the ancient dame who lives in my castle is Morgan la Fay, the famous enchantress. She has a grudge against Arthur and his court, and it was she who sent me there, disguised as you now see me, to propose that strange bargain, and to bring one of Arthur's knights to shame. But you have proved that they cannot be so easily led astray, and thanks to you her enchantment has failed."

Again the Green Knight invited Gawain to come back with him to the castle. Gawain thanked him and refused, and after a courteous leave-taking, he turned his horse and set off on his homeward journey.

When, after many days, he arrived back at Arthur's court, he told the whole story to the king. Everyone there praised the noble way in which he had acted, and excused him for the small fault of hiding away the girdle. But Gawain never excused himself; and always afterwards he wore it round his waist, so that he might remember, in moments of too much pride, the one time when he had lacked loyalty and courage.

REYNARD THE FOX AND HIS UNCLE BRUIN

OF all the animals in the animal kingdom, no one gave so much trouble to his friends as Reynard the Fox. Indeed, you couldn't truthfully say that Reynard had any real friends; for he played his foolish (and often cruel) tricks on large and small animals alike. He wasn't particularly big, and he wasn't particularly strong, but he always managed to get the better of the other creatures; for he had a brain, had Reynard, and he knew the weaknesses of them all. For deceit and cunning, no one could come near him.

"We must hold a trial," said King Lion gravely. "A trial, with myself for judge, and you other animals as witnesses and jury; and Reynard must come to the court and answer for his misdeeds." And they took a huge sheet of paper, and made a tremendously long list of all the wicked things Reynard had done.

It didn't take long to get ready for the trial; but when everybody had come together, they suddenly realized that they couldn't hold a trial with a prisoner.

"Why, where's Reynard?" asked the Lion, on his spectacles and looking around him in surprise.

"Perhaps—perhaps he didn't quite like to," observed the Mouse timidly.

"Not here?" said the king. "Then he must be fetched!"

"Fetched?" they all repeated, looking at one another doubtfully.

"Yes, someone must go and tell him that

animals are assembled in court to try him for his wickedness. Someone must certainly go," he added, looking very hard at Bruin the Bear.

"What, me again?" said Bruin. "I knew it would be me." He got to his feet, and lumbered off slowly into the forest. "Always is," he grumbled.

Well, there it was, and Reynard the Fox had to be fetched.

Bruin plodded through the forest on his way to Reynard's house, or rather castle, for the animals lived in castles in those days. Arriving at last, he found the gates shut and barred. He seized hold of them and shook them, but it was no use at all. So he sat back on his tail—swaying from side to side, as bears do—and called out in a loud voice:

"Are you at home, Reynard? I have been sent here by King Lion to fetch you to court, where you are to be tried for all the wicked things you have done. The king says that if you do not come at once you shall answer with your life, and your house and goods will be seized by the Crown. If you take my advice, you will go along with me now without delay."

Reynard, who was sitting just inside his gate, basking in the sun, raised his head in surprise.

"Is that you, dear Uncle Bruin?" he called. ("The Fox and the Bear were relations; though of course they weren't very alike, for Reynard had a great deal of brain and very little bulk, while Bruin had just a great deal of bulk.") "How glad I am to see you, uncle. I would have answered you before, only I was busy saying my prayers, and of course I couldn't interrupt *those*, even for you. What a pity you had to come all this long way to find me; for if you hadn't come, I was to have gone to court myself to-morrow. All the

same, I am glad you are here. I am not feeling at all well—I have such terrible pains inside me. Perhaps you will know how to cure them."

"Why, what is the cause of these pains?" asked Bruin, very surprised.

"I have been eating an entirely new food," said Reynard. "I am afraid it has not quite agreed with me."

"You make me curious," said the Bear. "What food can it possibly be?"

"Oh, nothing that you would care for," answered Reynard. "I don't suppose you have ever come across it. Have you by any chance heard of honey?"

"Honey?" exclaimed Bruin.

"Ah, well, I didn't really suppose you had," said Reynard. "We poor countryfolk are not lords like yourself. We have to live on very common food. Honey isn't at all bad, though, if you don't eat too much of it. These honeycombs were large and full, and the juice was simply dripping from them."

Bruin's tongue began to travel to and fro across his lips, and he swallowed once or twice. At last he said:

"What's this, nephew! Honeycombs! Do you call them a common food? Why, they are fit for the greatest emperors in the world! Wherever did you find all this honey?"

"Oh, come, uncle! Surely you're joking! Surely *you* wouldn't eat so common a food as honey! (Though they *were* rather nice, to be sure—and simply dripping with juice!) Why, if you liked, I could lead you to a spot where there is so much honey that ten you could never eat it."

"If I liked! Ten bears! Dripping with
Bruin sat back on his tail and waved his front

joy at the very thought of it. "Take me there at once, nephew, and I will be your true friend for evermore!"

"Very well, uncle. Not far from here there lives a farmer named Lanfert, who has so much honey that you could not eat it all in ten years. There are a good seven tons of it, uncle, and you shall have it all."

Bruin was now almost mad for honey. "Take me to it!" he begged. "For one good meal I will stop the mouths of all your enemies."

"Then follow me," said Reynard.

They set off through the wood, Reynard going first to show the way, and Bruin lumbering along after him, panting aloud in his eagerness to get at the meal. Soon they came in sight of Lanfert's house, which stood near the edge of the forest.

Now this Lanfert was a carpenter, and a few days before he had carried into his yard a hollow tree-trunk, and had started to split it down the middle. It had been tiring work, and when the trunk was split open some little distance, Lanfert had left the work till another day. But first of all he had put into the cleft two stout pieces of wood, so that it should not close up again.

Reynard and Bruin crept forward quietly across the yard.

"Here we are!" whispered Reynard. "Inside that tree trunk you will find all the honey you want! Only do be careful, uncle, and don't eat too much—you will get such terrible pains if you don't look out!"

"Don't worry yourself about me, nephew," answered Bruin. "Just let me get at the honey—I will manage for myself after that."

Now every bear knows that a hole in a tree is just the place to find honey. Bruin hurried round to the end of the tree trunk, and thrust his head into the hole.

"Can't see it," came his muffled voice, presently.

"A bit further in," Reynard called back. "Simply dripping with juice!"

Bruin snuffed a little, and pushed in his head and ears. Then the Fox chuckled to himself, leapt on to the tree trunk and pulled out the wooden wedges. The trunk closed up, and Bruin found himself trapped.

How he howled when he found his head fixed fast in the hole! He pulled and scratched and rolled from side to side, but it was no use. He was held so fast that he could not escape. Such a noise he made! Lanfert and his family, hearing the cries, came rushing out to see what the matter was. Reynard spied them, and calling out: "I hope you like your honey, uncle! But whatever you do, don't eat too much! You're going to have such terrible pains in a minute!" he turned tail and hurried off into the forest.

Meanwhile Lanfert, who saw that the Bear was firmly caught, sent for all his friends and neighbours, and told them to bring whatever weapons they had. Some brought broomsticks, some rakes, some pitchforks; the priest brought the cross from the church, and Dame Jullock, his wife, brought her spindle. All the old women who hadn't a tooth in their heads came to watch the fun. Bruin heard this army charging down at him, and he was so frightened that he managed at last to pull out his forepaws and head, though he left most of the fur behind him. Before he could escape they had all set upon him, and for a few moments he sat there, groaning with pain, while they used their weapons freely. When he could stand it no longer he made a dash for the river, which was close by, and tumbled headlong into it, pushing in Dame Jullock at the same time.

There was a great shouting at this. "Help! Help!" called the priest, when he saw his wife in the water. "Dame Jullock is drowning! If any man saves her, all his sins shall be forgiven, past, present and future!"

Hearing this, they all left off pursuing the Bear, and set to work to rescue Dame Jullock instead.

It was lucky for Bruin they did so. He was able to swim away down the river, while the priest (rather foolishly) called after him: "Turn back, villain, and let me be revenged on you!"

Bruin swam till he could swim no more; then he climbed on to the bank and lay there, panting and exhausted.

He ached from head to tail. He had lost his furry hood from his head; he had lost his leathern gloves from his paws; he had lost his temper; he had lost a meal of juicy honeycombs—if you can say he ever had it to lose. While he lay groaning and pondering on all his woes, the bushes parted and a red muzzle was pushed through.

"Hallo, Uncle Bruin," said a voice. "Dear me, I am sorry to see you like this! I suppose you have been made to pay for the honeycombs you stole!"

"You red villain!" said Bruin, but he could do nothing, he was in such great pain.

"You seem to have left your hood and gloves behind you at Lanfert's," went on the Fox. "How very careless of you, uncle!"

Bruin groaned aloud, but said nothing.

"Why, I have it!" exclaimed Reynard. "You have had your head shaved! You are joining the Church! Tell me, uncle, are you going to be a monk, an abbot or a friar?"

But Bruin made no answer to any of these taunts; he only groaned once more.

"Poor uncle!" said Reynard. "I told you you would have bad pains, didn't I? You must be more careful next time!" And he turned tail to run off. Just before he disappeared he grinned back over his shoulder, licked his lips, and chuckled: "Simply *dripping* with juice!" Then he trotted away into the forest.

"Impudent scoundrel!" grunted the Bear, knowing it was useless to try to run after him. He got awkwardly to his feet, but his front paws hurt him so much that he could not walk on them, and his back was so painful that he could not stand on his hind legs either. At last he found that by rolling over and over he could get along fairly well, and in this ridiculous way he set off through the woods till he reached King Lion's court.

When the king and his court saw Bruin coming, they thought this must be some new animal that they had never met before. The Lion was the first to recognize him. "Why," he exclaimed, "this is Bruin, my servant! But whatever *has* he been doing to himself? Who can have dared to treat him like this?"

Bruin came rolling forward into the middle of the circle.

"Look, my lord," he moaned. "Look how I have been treated! All this is the doing of that wicked Reynard the Fox, who got his revenge on me just because I carried your royal summons to him!"

"It is enough!" said the king. "He shall answer for this! We will summon him once more to appear before us in court! To-morrow another messenger shall go, and *this* time the criminal shall be brought to justice!"

So the king thought. But it was many a long day before Reynard stood in court to answer for his sins; and the old story tells us that when he *did* come he argued so craftily that they could prove nothing against him, and had to let him go scot-free after all!

PHRYXUS AND HELLE

MANY, many years ago there was a man called Athamas, and he had a wife whose name was Nephele. They had two children—a boy and a girl. The name of the boy was Phryxus, and his sister was called Helle. They were happy children, and played about merrily in the fields, and their mother Nephele loved them dearly. But by and by their mother was taken away from them; and their father Athamas forgot all about her, for he had not loved her as he ought to have done. And very soon he married another wife, whose name was Ino; but she was not kind to Phryxus and Helle, and they began to be very unhappy. Their cheeks were no more rosy, and their faces did not look bright and cheerful, as they used to do when they could go home to their mother Nephele; and so they played less and less, until you could never have thought that they were the same children who were so happy before Nephele was taken away. But Ino hated these poor children, for she was a cruel woman. She wanted to get rid of Phryxus and Helle, and she thought how she might do so. So she said that Phryxus was a wicked boy, and spoilt all the corn, and prevented it from growing, and that they would not be able to make any bread till Phryxus was killed. She thus talked very often to Athamas, and persuaded him at last that he ought to kill Phryxus.

But although Athamas was such a bad father, and cared nothing about Phryxus and Helle, their mother Nephele saw what was going on, although they could not see her, because there was a cloud between them;

and Nephele was determined that Athamas should not hurt Phryxus. So what do you think she did? Why, she sent a ram, which had a golden fleece, to carry away her dear children. And one day, when they were sitting down on the grass, (for they were too sad and unhappy to play), they saw a beautiful ram come into the field. And Phryxus said to Helle, "O Helle, look what a funny sheep this is that is coming to us; see, he shines all over like gold, and all the hair on his body is golden too." So the ram came nearer and nearer, and at last he lay down quite close to them, and looked so quiet that Phryxus and Helle were not at all afraid of him. But they did not know that it was Nephele who had sent the ram. So they played with the sheep, and they took him by the horns, and they stroked his golden fleece, and patted him on the head; and the ram looked so pleased that they thought they would like to have a ride on his back.

So Phryxus got up first, and put his arms round the ram's neck, and little Helle got up behind her brother and put her arms round his waist, and then they called to the ram to stand up and carry them about. And the ram knew what they wanted, and began to walk first, and then he began to run; and Phryxus and Helle thought they had never had such fun before.

But by and by what do you think the ram did? Why, it rose up from the ground and began to fly. And when it first left the earth Phryxus and Helle could not make out how it was, and Helle said, "O Phryxus, I declare the sheep is beginning to fly!" and they began to get frightened, and they begged the ram to go down again and put them upon the ground; but the ram turned his head round, and looked so

gently at them, that they were not frightened any more. So Phryxus told Helle to hold on tight round his waist; and he said, "Dear Helle, do not be afraid, for I do not think the ram means to do us any harm, and I almost fancy that he must have been sent by our dear mother Nephele, and that he will carry us to some better country, where the people will be kind to us, as our mother used to be."

Now it so happened that, just as the ram began to fly away with the two children on its back, Ino and Athamas came into the field, thinking how they might kill Phryxus. But they could not see him anywhere; until they looked up, and high up in the air over their heads they saw the ram flying away with the children on its back. So they cried out and made a great noise, and threw stones up into the air, thinking that the ram would get frightened and come down to the earth again. But the ram did not care how much noise they made or how many stones they threw up; he flew on and on, higher and higher, till at last he looked only like a little yellow speck in the blue sky; and then Ino and Athamas saw him no more.

So these wicked people sat down, very angry and unhappy. They were sorry because Phryxus and Helle had got away quite safely, when they wanted to kill them. But they were much more sorry because they had gone away on the back of a ram whose fleece was made of gold. Ino said to Athamas, "What a pity that we did not come into the field a little sooner, for then we might have caught this ram, and stripped off his golden fleece, and sold it, and we should have been rich and have had everything that we could want." Then Athamas said, "Yes, Ino, we should have been very happy if we could have

caught this ram: we must certainly go and ask everybody, till we find out where this ram comes down: and then we will say that it is our ram, which has run away; and so we shall get him back, and become rich, and have all that we want."

All this time the ram was flying on and on, higher and higher, with Phryxus and Helle on its back. And Helle began to be very tired, and she said to her brother that she could not hold on much longer; and Phryxus said, "Dear Helle, try and hold on as long as you possibly can; I daresay the ram will soon reach the place to which he wants to carry us, and then you shall lie down on the soft grass, and have such pleasant sleep that you will not feel tired any more." But Helle said, "Dearest Phryxus, I will indeed try and hold fast as long as I can: but my arms are getting so weak that I am afraid it will not be for long." And by and by, when she grew weaker, she said, "Dear Phryxus, if I fall off you will not see Helle any more; but you must not forget her—you must always love her as much as she loved you; and then some day we shall see each other again, and live with our dear mother Nephele." Phryxus said, "O, Helle, try and hold fast a little longer still. I can never love any one so much as I love you: but I want you to live with me on the earth, and I cannot bear to think of living without you."

But it was useless for Phryxus to talk so kindly and try to encourage his sister, for he was not able to make her arms and her body stronger. By and by poor Helle fell off, just as they were flying over a narrow part of the sea, and she fell into it and was drowned. People now call the part of the sea where she fell in, the Hellespont, which means the sea of little Helle

So Phryxus was left alone on the ram's back. And the ram flew on and on a long way, till it came to the palace of Actes, the king of Colchis. King Actes was walking about in his garden, when looking up into the sky, he saw something which looked very like a yellow sheep with a little boy on its back. King Actes rubbed his eyes, and looked again, and he was very much puzzled, for he had never seen such a strange thing before; and he called his wife and his children and everyone else that was in the house, to come and see this wonderful sight. They looked, and saw the ram coming nearer and nearer. Then they knew that it really was a little boy on its back; and by and by the ram came down upon the earth near their feet, and Phryxus got off its back. King Actes went up to him, and took him by the hand, and asked him who he was. "Tell me, little boy, how it is that you come here, riding in this strange way, on the back of a ram?" Then Phryxus told him how the ram had come into the field where he and Helle were playing, and had carried them away from Ino and Athamas, who were very unkind to them; and how little Helle had grown tired, and fallen off his back, and had been drowned in the sea. King Actes took Phryxus up in his arms, and said, "Do not be afraid, my good little boy: I will take care of you and give you all that you want, and no one shall hurt you here. The ram which has carried you through the air shall stay in this beautiful place, where he will have as much grass to eat as he can possibly want, and a little stream to drink out of and to bathe in whenever he likes."

So Phryxus was taken into the palace of King Actes, and everybody loved him, because he was good and kind and never hurt any one. He grew up healthy

and strong, and he learnt to ride about the country on a big horse, and leap and run over the hills and valleys, and swim about in the clear rivers. He had not forgotten his dear sister Helle, for he still loved her as much as ever, and very often wished that she could come and live with him again; but he knew that she was now with his mother Nephele, in the happy land to which good people go after they are dead. Therefore he was never unhappy when he thought of his sister, for he said, "One day I too shall be taken to that bright land, and live with my mother and my sister again if I try always to do what is right." Very often he used to go and see the beautiful ram with the golden fleece feeding in the garden, and stroke its golden locks.

But the ram was not so strong now as he was when he flew through the air with Phryxus and Helle on his back, for he was growing old and weak; and at last the ram died, and Phryxus was very sorry. King Aetes had the golden fleece taken off from his body, and they nailed it up upon the wall; and everyone came to look at the fleece which was made of gold, and to hear the story of Phryxus and Helle.

But you must not forget that all this while those wicked people, Athamas and Ino, had been hunting about everywhere, to see if they could find where the ram had gone with the children on his back; and they asked every one whom they met if they had seen a sheep with a fleece of gold carrying away two little children. But no one could tell them anything about it, till at last they came to the house of Aetes, the king of Colchis. They came to the door, and asked Aetes if he had seen Phryxus and Helle, and the sheep with the golden fleece. Then Aetes said to them, "I have

never seen little Helle, for she fell from the ram's back, and was drowned in the sea; but Phryxus is with me still; and as for the ram, see, here is his golden fleece nailed up upon the wall."

Just then Phryxus happened to come in, and Actes asked them, "Look now, and tell me if this is the same Phryxus whom you are looking for?" When they saw him they said, "It is indeed the same Phryxus who went away on the ram's back; but he is grown into a strong man." And they began to be afraid, because they thought they could not ill-treat Phryxus now that he was grown big, as they used to do when he was a little boy. So they tried to entice him away by pretending to be glad to see him; and they said, "Come away with us, dear Phryxus, and we shall live happily together." But Phryxus saw from the look of their faces that they were not telling the truth, and that they hated him still; and he said to them, "I will not go with you; King Actes has been very good to me, and you were always very unkind to me and to my dear sister, and therefore I will never leave King Actes to go away with you."

Then they said to Actes, "Phryxus may stay here, but give us the golden fleece which came from the ram that carried away the children." But Actes said, "I will not. I know that you only ask for it because you are greedy people, and want to sell it, and get all sorts of things which you think that you would like to have, and therefore you shall not have it."

Then Ino and Athamas turned away in a rage, and went to their own country again, wretched and unhappy because they could not get the golden fleece. So you see that, with all their greediness, these miserable people remained as poor as ever.

G. W. Cox.

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

THE great warrior Rustum had travelled alone all day, his only companion being his faithful horse, Ruksh. Wearied by his wanderings, Rustum lay down to sleep in the forest, and while he slept a band of men approached stealthily, and attempted to lead off Ruksh by force. They did not find this too easy: the great war-steed fought long and fiercely, biting one man's head right off, and trampling another man to death. However, Ruksh was overcome at last, and conducted away through the forest.

When Rustum woke up he was grieved to see his horse gone. "He would never have gone away from me of his own free will," he thought. "This must be the work of a thief."

Rustum set to work to find the tracks of the horse, and not only did he find them, but he followed them to the gates of a great city. There he was received by the king of the country—for the mighty Rustum was respected wherever he went—and was invited into the palace.

"I have not come to feast with you," said Rustum angrily. "I have come for my revenge."

"Revenge?" cried the king. "But what have I done?"

"Someone in your city has stolen my horse," replied the warrior. "I traced his footmarks right to your gates."

But the king of the city said he knew nothing whatever about the theft. "If you will stay for the night with me," he said, "I will do my best to find out who

the robber is, and punish him." So Rustum allowed himself to be persuaded, and a great banquet was quickly prepared for him. Soon after, he retired to his couch, and it was not long before he was asleep.

In the middle of the night he awoke suddenly to see a slave standing by his bed, holding a bright lamp. A moment later the curtains of his chamber were drawn aside, and in stepped the most beautiful maiden.

"Who are you?" asked Rustum.

"I am Tamina, the daughter of the king," replied the maiden. "Please don't be angry with me. I have heard all about your brave deeds on the battlefield, and they made me love you so much that I decided I must find a way of bringing you to the palace. It was I who sent the band of men to steal your horse; and I promise you that your horse shall be given back to you tomorrow. And now, will you please go to my father, and ask if you can marry me?"

At first Rustum was rather surprised at all this; but the maiden was so beautiful that he readily agreed to do as she asked. On the morrow he went to the king to ask his consent. The old man was only too proud to have his daughter wedded to such a famous warrior, and they were married amidst rejoicings.

Rustum stayed for many months with Tamina, but at last he knew that he must go, for his own country had need of him. So he said to her: "I must go. The field of battle calls me. But I will come back one day, and perhaps, while I am gone, the gods will grant you a little son." He took from his arm an onyx stone which he always wore there. "If you do indeed have a son, bind this onyx on his arm, and it will make him as strong as a lion. But if the child should be a daughter, then place the onyx in her hair." Then he kissed

Tamina, and sprang upon the back of the faithful Ruksh, and galloped quickly away.

Now not long afterwards a child was born to Tamina—a beautiful boy, who, when he was only a month old, looked at least three years of age. Tamina loved him dearly, and she said to herself: “I must let Rustum know. But if I tell him he has a little boy, he will certainly want to come and take him away from me. No, I will tell him that the child is a girl.”

So she sent messengers to Rustum to tell him that he had a daughter, and Rustum was disappointed, for he had hoped for a son. Still, he sent back presents for the child, and said that when his battles were over he hoped to come and see both the baby and its mother.

Years passed away, and Sohrab grew to be a youth. In all the city there was no one, boy or man, who was mightier than he. Everywhere he went he was admired and loved. But from time to time he was vexed, because he did not know who his father was.

“Tell me,” he said to his mother one day, “who was my father? I really think I ought to know.”

His mother sighed and said: “I suppose I must tell you. Your father was Rustum, the greatest hero that has ever lived.”

“Why, I have heard all about him!” cried the boy, delighted. “Fancy having Rustum for a father!”

He was very pleased at this discovery; but his mother was not so pleased, for a few days later he said: “Mother, tell me where my father is to be found. I must go forth and help him at the wars.”

His mother began to weep when she heard this request. But it was no use weeping; Sohrab was determined to go forth and fight, and at last he said: “I know what I’ll do. I will go and conquer Kai-

Khosroo, the tyrant whom my father obeys. I will take his kingdom from him, and give it to my father instead. How pleased he will be to have such a son!"

So Sohrab got ready to go forth and do battle with Kai-Khosroo. Now there was another king, called Afrasiab, who also wanted to go to war with Kai-Khosroo. Afrasiab had heard of the might of young Sohrab, and he came to him and said: "I hear you are going to march against Kai-Khosroo. Well, you will not need a very big army, for I will lend you my own, with myself at the head of it. What do you say to my plan?"

"I agree," said Sohrab, "if you will let me give Kai-Khosroo's kingdom to my father, the mighty Rustum."

"With all my heart," replied Afrasiab, and they got their armies together, and set off to Kai-Khosroo's country.

Kai-Khosroo was very worried when he heard that Afrasiab was going to attack him. "I must get someone to help me," he thought. "Rustum hates Afrasiab; I must ask him to come to my aid."

Now Rustum and Afrasiab were ancient enemies, and Afrasiab had only offered to help Sohrab in the hope that the youth might conquer his own father. When Rustum heard that Afrasiab and a strange young warrior called Sohrab were coming with a large army, he readily agreed to help Kai-Khosroo. The two armies marched to meet each other, and finally pitched camp on either side of a sandy plain.

Now a messenger came from Afrasiab to the camp of Kai-Khosroo. "A challenge!" he cried. "The young champion, Sohrab, commands me to bid you send forth your best warrior, that he may fight with him

single-handed!" Then the messenger returned across the plain to his tent.

Of course Rustum was chosen, and it was not long before the mighty warrior walked out, all armed, to the middle of the plain. There he stood, gazing over at the other camp, and soon he espied a youth coming towards him.

Rustum looked gloomily at the young man. He was tall and slender, but he looked strong in spite of his youth. "Just the sort of lad I should have chosen for a son, if I had ever had one," he thought. "What a pity to kill such a handsome boy!"

So the old warrior put out his hand, and beckoned to Sohrab to come closer. "Sohrab," he said, "if that is your name—listen to me, and follow my advice. I have fought on many a battlefield; I am old and tried, and have never lost a fight in my life. You would do much better to quit the hosts of Afrasiab, and come back with me to Iran. I will treat you as my own son, for, by my life, I have never before seen so noble-looking a youth as you!"

Sohrab listened, and thought: "That voice! That gigantic figure! It must be Rustum!" (For no one had told him the name of the champion with whom he was to fight.) So he threw himself at Rustum's feet, and cried out: "Tell me, are you not Rustum?"

Now Rustum thought this must be a trick. "The youth knows well that I am Rustum," he said to himself, "and he is afraid to fight. He is trying to make peace with me." So he answered: "What is all this foolish talk about Rustum? You asked to be allowed to fight a champion of Kai-Khosroo single-handed. Very well, here is your champion. Now fight or yield!"

Sohrab sprang up in a rage and answered: "I am no coward! Defend yourself, whatever your name may be!"

They fought; first with lances and then, when those were splintered, with swords. The swords were soon hacked to pieces, and they turned to wrestling. Even so, neither could get any advantage of the other, till Sohrab suddenly seized his club, whirled it over his head, and gave Rustum a blow which sent him reeling backward.

Rustum recovered slowly from the blow. "Night is drawing near," he said. "Let us continue the fight to-morrow."

Sohrab agreed, and they both went back to their tents.

"Well?" said Kai-Khosroo to Rustum. "How is it you did not manage to overcome the young man?"

"Because he is a better warrior than I am," answered Rustum. "We fight again to-morrow, and I shall be lucky if I succeed in beating him."

Meanwhile, Sohrab was questioning one of the wise men of King Afrasiab. "Are you sure the warrior was not Rustum?" he asked. "How terrible if he turned out to be my own father!"

But the wise man, whose eyesight was not what it had been, answered: "No, it was not Rustum, though the man certainly looked rather like him."

The next day, as he strode out to begin the combat, Sohrab began to feel some pity for this old man who had fought so hard the day before. He would very much have liked to end the fight; but Rustum was angry at having been beaten in their last encounter, and went at Sohrab fiercely. It was not long before the old warrior had fallen to his knees in the sand, carried to

the earth by the force of one of his own blows. Sohrab stood by, and instead of killing his opponent when he was helpless, he allowed him to rise to his feet.

"Let us make a truce now," begged Sohrab. "Let us forget all about fighting, and pledge each other in red wine, and send our armies away."

But Rustum said grimly: "We fight again to-morrow," and went back in silence to his tent.

The third day dawned. The two warriors went forth again to the field, and faced each other as before. A storm was threatening; the wind moaned across the plain. On either side the two armies stood in bright sunshine, but in the middle a mist almost hid the two champions from view.

They fought: never before so terribly. First Rustum attacked with his spear, but although he pierced the shield of his opponent right through, he did not succeed in wounding him. Next Sohrab whirled his sword, and cut off the plume from Rustum's helmet, but the head beneath it was unharmed. Sohrab lost no time, but raised his sword again; it struck, and splintered to pieces against Rustum's coat of mail.

The old man's face lit with a smile of triumph. He raised his lance, shook it ferociously over his head, and gave forth his terrible battle-shout: "Rustum!"

At this cry, Sohrab suddenly dropped his shield, and stood like a man bewildered. Before he could raise the shield again, his father's spear had pierced his side, and he fell down bleeding in the sand.

Rustum stood over him. "So all your boastings have come to this!" he mocked. "You thought you would finish me off, and then perhaps fight with the great Rustum himself. Now you are slain, and by an unknown man."

"You are wrong! It is not you who have killed me!" retorted the youth. "It is Rustum himself! If you had not cried out my father's name at that moment, I should never have dropped my shield. Some day the news of this will come to my father, and then he will not rest till he has punished you!"

"This is foolish talk," said Rustum. "The mighty Rustum never had a son."

"Ah, but he had!" cried Sohrab. "My mother deceived him and told him it was a daughter, so he never knew the truth. But see, here on my arm is the onyx that Rustum told her to bind there."

He raised his arm, and bared it. Rustum looked closer, and saw the charm he had given to Tamina. For a moment he reeled, dizzy with horror; then he cried out: "Oh, Sohrab—your father!" and he fell down on the sand.

For a while he remained quite still, as though he were dead. But his son dragged himself to where he lay, and kissed him, and began to speak gently and lovingly to him. After a while Rustum roused up and looked wildly around him. He saw, he remembered what he had done, and he seized his sword to slay himself.

"Don't do that, father," said Sohrab. "What use would it be? Sit down here beside me on the sand, and take my head between your hands, and kiss my cheeks, and call me your son."

But Rustum wept bitterly, and cried: "What is the good of living any longer? If only I could die, my son, instead of you!"

Sohrab replied: "Have no fear, father. Peace will come even to you one day. You must wait patiently for a little longer." And reaching forth his hand, he drew out the spear from his side, and allowed the blood to flow.

They sat very still awhile, and Ruksh came close to them and bowed his head, and his big tears fell down into the sand.

And then the mist became thicker and thicker; and the two armies, facing each other in bright sunshine, could see nothing on the plain between them; till the mist rose again, dispersing towards the sun; and the hosts, gazing in wonder, saw the body of Sohrab lying covered with a cloak, and Rustum sitting motionless by his side.



PARZIVAL

I. FROM BOY TO KNIGHT

IN a lonely house on the edge of a forest lived young Parzival with his mother. His father had been a knight of great renown, but he had died fighting, and had brought great grief to Parzival's mother. So she was anxious that the youth, her only son, should know nothing about knighthood, or battles, or tournaments, or courtly customs. The boy lived a very quiet life, playing near the house or wandering in the forest with bow and arrows.

Sometimes he would stand still for a long time, listening to the songs of the birds; then he would shoot at them, till their little forms fluttered lifeless to the grass. He would think how the music, which his cruel hand had stilled, had touched his heart with its sweetness; then he would run home to his mother and cry.

His mother, who was anxious to keep him with her always, was very jealous of his love for the birds, for she feared they might turn him from home and from her. She set snares to capture the birds and to stop them from singing. But some of them broke their nets, and began to sing again; and the boy realized that his mother had tried to deceive him.

"Why do you torment the birds, mother?" he asked.

"Perhaps I was wrong to do so," she said. "After all, the birds' song is a gift of God."

"God, mother?" asked Parzival, puzzled. "Who may God be?"

"God is light, and he dwells in light. He is brighter

than a summer's day," said his mother mysteriously. "If you kneel down and pray to him he will protect you in your troubles and dangers."

"I see," said Parzival, and he went out into the wood.

Now it happened that a knight was riding that way, and as he came nearer through the wood Parzival saw how the sun shone on his plumed and jewelled helmet, and his costly armour bright with dew. He rode a Spanish war-horse, and his stirrups jingled with little golden bells. Seeing the brightness about him, Parzival came timidly forward and knelt down at the knight's feet.

"Why do you kneel there, fair youth?" asked the knight.

"Because you are God," replied Parzival. "My mother told me that God was brighter than a summer's day. She said I was to kneel before him and pray to him."

The other shook his head. "I am not God," said he. "I am only a knight of Arthur's court."

"A knight? I never heard tell of a knight before. But if that is the reason for your strength and beauty, then I should like to be a knight, too."

"To be made a knight you must first go to Arthur's court," explained the warrior.

"What are all those gold rings you are wearing?" continued Parzival. "My mother and her maidens wear rings, but they are not all woven together like yours."

"That," said the knight, "is the chain-mail of my armour, which it is necessary for all knights to wear."

"Thank you," said Parzival. The knight then bid him a courteous farewell, and Parzival turned and ran

home to his mother. "Mother! Mother!" he cried. "I want to be a knight!"

His mother was very grieved when she heard what he said. He told her all about the meeting in the forest, and she soon saw that it would be useless to try to turn him aside from his purpose. However, she thought of a way by which Parzival might be made to return to her very soon. She would dress him up to look foolish, and people would laugh at such a strange knight, and make him glad to come back home. So she clothed him in a suit of coarse sackcloth, reaching to the knee, with a clown's cap for his head, and leggings of calf's skin, with the hairy side outwards. Then she mounted him on a feeble, bow-legged steed, and he was prepared for his journey to Arthur's court.

"Now," said his mother, "I will give you some last advice before you go. Keep from the untrodden path, and cross where the stream is clear. Greet all men courteously, and when you part from them say: 'May God have you in his safe keeping.' Always be ready to help a maiden in distress; win a ring from her and she will send you on your journey with a kiss. Now farewell, my son; you will return to me before long."

Parzival bade farewell to his mother, and rode off on his way. Everyone who watched him go wept for pity, he looked such a ridiculous sight. But for all that he never returned home, and his mother's attempts to keep him from knighthood were in vain.

Parzival rode on for many a mile, and at last he espied a green field with a silken tent in the middle. Getting down from his horse he walked towards the tent, for he was faint with travel and hungry for lack of food. He stepped in at the opening, and there he saw a lady asleep. One of her arms lay over the

coverlet, and on her white hand gleamed a golden ring. Parzival remembered that his mother had told him to win a ring from a maiden; so he bent down, and took the ring from her hand.

The lady awoke. "Who are you?" she cried out in terror. "What do you want here?"

"I am hungry," said Parzival. "I am hungry—and thirsty, too."

The lady looked at this strange creature, and did not know what to make of him. "Well, please don't make a meal of me," she said. "There are two roasted fowl with bread and wine over there: eat as much as you want."

Parzival needed no second bidding. He ate greedily, and drank as much wine as he wanted. The lady, fearful that her husband would return at any moment, watched his every movement anxiously. When he had finished she said: "Now get away as fast as you can, for if my husband finds you here he will certainly kill you."

"Then goodbye," said Parzival. "And God have you in his safe keeping—for so my mother told me to say." He bent down and kissed the lady, left the tent, mounted his horse and was soon riding on his way.

He had not gone very far before he saw a knight coming towards him. This knight was dressed from head to foot in red armour, and Parzival afterwards learnt that he was the famous Red Knight of Arthur's court.

"Greetings, fair youth," said the knight. "Where are you going?"

"I am going to the court of King Arthur," said Parzival. "I am anxious to be made a knight."

"If you are looking for King Arthur's court, this is

the road you must take," said the Red Knight. "Ride straight onward, and you will come to the king's castle."

"Thank you," said Parzival. "And God have you in his safe keeping—for so my mother told me to say."

The Red Knight smiled at this, and Parzival rode on to Arthur's court.

Here he was received by one of the squires, and led to where the king was seated among his knights and courtiers. Parzival looked from one man to another, and seeing their rich clothes and gleaming armour he said in wonder: "What a lot of King Arthurs there seem to be! Please tell me, which is the king?"

The knights laughed, and pointed out King Arthur, who sat with Queen Guinevere by his side.

"Well, fair youth, what do you want of me?" the king asked, while all the court wondered at the strange clothing of the young man.

"Please, I want to be made a knight," said Parzival.

The courtiers standing around laughed, and the king said gravely: "Very well. But before you can be a knight you must have a suit of armour."

"Very well, I will have the Red Knight's armour," said Parzival. "I like the colour of that."

"Will no other armour do?" asked the king.

"No," said the youth stoutly.

"Then go to the Red Knight and tell him you want his armour," said Arthur, and all the court smiled, for they knew that that meant he would have to fight the Red Knight.

"Thank you, I will go to-morrow," said Parzival, and he was led from the hall by one of the squires.

"What a handsome boy!" said one of the ladies when Parzival had gone. "What a pity to send him to his death like that!"

"Let him go," said several of the courtiers. "The Red Knight will teach him not to be so bold, before he has finished with him."

The following morning, Parzival came again into the hall to say good-bye to Arthur. "Farewell," he said. "And may God have you in his safe keeping—for so my mother told me to say." Then he turned about to leave the castle.

Now there was in the court of the king a lady called Kunneware, who had never been known to smile; and there was a prophecy that she never *would* smile until she looked on the boldest and fairest knight in the whole world. Parzival walked out of the great hall, many knights and ladies laughing at his foolish appearance; till turning the corner into the courtyard he came suddenly face to face with Kunneware. A moment later she too burst into loud laughter. Parzival passed on, leaving the whole court in wonder and amazement.

He had not travelled very far when he saw the Red Knight riding towards him.

"Greeting, fair youth," he said. "What do you seek now?"

"Arthur says that you are to give me your armour," said Parzival. "May I have it at once?"

"But that means," said the Red Knight, "that you must fight for it. Did you not understand that?"

"I didn't," said Parzival. "But I will fight."

Now Parzival, although he was so youthful and foolish, lacked neither strength nor courage. He raised his javelin at once to defend himself, while the other drew his sword and they fell to. Nor was it long before Parzival, unskilled as he was, had slain the Red Knight, who lay on the ground before him.

Parzival now began to take off the Red Knight's

armour. This was a long and difficult task, and he found it even more difficult to put the armour on himself. He would not take off the leggings his mother had given him, so he had to put the armour on top of them. Dressed in this way he mounted, with some trouble, on the Red Knight's horse, and cried: "Hoorah! At last I'm a real knight!" Then off he rode in search of new adventures.

2. FROM KNIGHT TO KING

Parzival had no idea how to check or control his war-steed, and the animal carried him a great many miles before he arrived, in the evening, at the castle of a knight called Gurnemanz. The horse was tired with his long run, and decided to stop here; so Parzival was able to dismount.

The youth was well received by wise old Gurnemanz, and he was allowed to remain some weeks at the castle. At first, everyone was surprised at his simple manner of speaking, and even more surprised to find that under his armour he wore calf-skin leggings—and hairy ones at that. But through Gurnemanz's patient wisdom, the young man began to learn the customs of knighthood. He learnt to ride a horse, to handle a lance, to hold a shield erect and to joust with other knights.

Gurnemanz also taught him courtly behaviour and speech. "When you talk," he said, "do not continually make mention of your mother, or men will laugh at you. Use your eyes and your ears, and don't ask too many questions."

So Parzival grew daily in manhood and courage, and when he left Gurnemanz the old man was sorry to lose

him. But Parzival rode away, and onward for many a mile, till one evening he came to a strange and solitary country, such as he had never set eyes on before. As darkness approached he began to seek a lodging for the night. Not far away stood a lonely castle, strongly built with tall turrets, and surrounded by a wide moat. Parzival rode towards it, crossed the drawbridge, went to the portal and knocked.

He was welcomed at once by squires, who conducted him in, washed and clothed him, and then led him into the huge hall of the castle. Here were assembled the knights who kept watch over the Grail, a sacred Stone with life-giving powers. From this Stone, bread was brought daily and distributed to the knights, and by virtue of the Grail each knight's cup was filled with wine. This bread and wine gave eternal youth to all who partook of it. From time to time, too, strange writings appeared on the Grail, foretelling changes that were to take place in the Grail kingdom.

Parzival was led to the couch of the Grail King, Amfortas, who lay afflicted with a grievous illness. Amfortas welcomed him kindly, and soon afterwards there passed into the hall a long procession of maidens, bearing tapers, silver candlesticks, a table, and lastly the Grail itself, shining with gems and giving forth a soft light. Squires brought bread from the Grail to each knight, and Parzival partook with the rest; then the knights raised their cups, which filled with wine from the same mysterious source. The procession of maidens passed out again, and the Grail was carried away.

Now all the while the Grail had been in the hall, Amfortas had writhed to and fro in great agony, as though he had had a seizure of some kind. Parzival sat wondering at the strange sight he had witnessed,

and it was on the tip of his tongue to ask why the king was in such pain; but he remembered Gurnemanz telling him not to ask so many questions, and he remained silent. Night fell, and Parzival was shown a couch, where he quickly fell asleep.

In the morning, when he woke, the castle was empty and deserted. He rose up rather sadly and made his way to the drawbridge; a squire, lingering there, called after him: "Fool! You had but to ask one question, and you would have won eternal fame!" Parzival did not understand this at all, and he rode out again on his way.

He met with many adventures, and fought with many a knight before, some months afterwards, he found himself again at Arthur's court. The fame of his exploits had gone before him, and Arthur welcomed him to the fellowship of his followers.

A great feast was prepared: Parzival was to be made a Knight of the Round Table. On the appointed day, just after the ceremony of knighting, Parzival was standing in the court thronged round by admiring knights and ladies, when the door of the hall suddenly opened. On the threshold appeared the enchantress Kundry, a maiden with a hideous face, famed for her knowledge of things that were hidden from other people.

"Parzival," she said, "you have failed in knightly duty."

There was silence in the court; everyone looked at Kundry, and from her to Parzival.

"You have failed in pity and loving-kindness towards your fellow man. When you were at the Grail castle, one question from you might have freed the Grail King from eternal suffering; but you remained silent, and now he lives on in the old agony. You have

brought sorrow and disappointment to the Knights of the Grail." Then Kundry left the hall abruptly, while Parzival stood there, puzzled and ashamed.

He did not really understand what he had done wrong, but he knew he must have failed in some great duty; and shortly afterwards he left the court again, determined to find the Grail castle once more. He wandered for many months, always inquiring where it was to be found, but still he could obtain no news of it; till on a Good Friday he came to the cell of an ancient hermit. Parzival told the old man his trouble, and he listened and nodded his head.

"Parzival," he said, "you are young and you do not understand. Many years ago the Grail King, for his sins, received a spear-wound from one of his enemies; and every time the Grail is brought in to give nourishment to the knights, the blood flows afresh from the wound. The sacred writing which appears on the Grail, has prophesied that the king shall never be released from his suffering, till a knight shall come and ask him these words: 'Amfortas, what is the cause of your suffering?' The prophecy says that only a sinless knight will ask the question; and you yourself might have asked it, when you were at the Grail castle, if you had been entirely free from sin."

"Free from sin?" asked Parzival. "What wrong have I done?"

"You have been guilty of two sins," replied the hermit. "You have left your mother all this time, so that she has died of grief; and you have slain the Red Knight for but little reason. Kneel, my son, and ask forgiveness for your wrong-doings."

Parzival knelt, and confessed to the hermit his two sins. When the hermit had asked God to pardon him,

he said: "Rise up, Parzival. Go forth again and you will find the castle of the Grail. This also I will tell you: of late the writing on the Stone has told that Amfortas's time of service draws to a close, and the name of a new king has appeared. Go forward, my son, and see what fortune awaits you."

Parzival now left the hermit's cell, and rode onward as before. He had not travelled very far before he espied the Grail castle, the tall turrets, the drawbridge and the moat. He crossed the drawbridge, knocked at the portal and was admitted again into the presence of the knights.

They welcomed him, washed him and gave him clothing, and then led him into the great hall. As he approached the couch of Amfortas, he heard the king's voice raised in grief: "I cannot bear to look on the Grail again. Kill me now, my knights, and put an end to the unspeakable agony!"

But now, in the hush that had suddenly fallen, the crowd of knights parted and Parzival moved gravely through their midst. He knelt by the couch of Amfortas, and prayed silently that the sorrow of the king might be ended. Then he rose to his feet, fixed his eyes on the king, and said: "Amfortas, what is the cause of your suffering?"

Immediately the Grail King leapt up from his couch, strong and well. Then he said: "The sacred writing on the Grail has announced our new king. We greet you, Parzival, lord of the Knights of the Grail!"

And the whole company repeated together: "We greet you, Parzival, lord of the Knights of the Grail!"

Then there was great rejoicing in the Grail castle, because of the healing of Amfortas and the coming of

the new king. Parzival's wanderings and struggles were at an end. Not for nothing had he passed through such strange adventures; they were the means by which he had been fitted to the high office of the King of the Grail, an office he was henceforth to hold till the end of his life.

NOTES

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE AGIB. (Arabia: Twelfth Century.)

No one knows for certain exactly when the *Thousand and One Nights* was written, but it is usually considered as dating from the twelfth or the thirteenth century. Its authorship cannot be ascribed to any one man; indeed, it seems probable that these tales grew up amongst the nomadic Arab tribes in much the same way as did the heroic tales amongst the Greeks, or *Beowulf* amongst the Saxons. Some original invention there must have been, but it is by oral addition and elaboration that the stories reached that perfection which made them worthy of being written down.

The *Thousand and One Nights* incorporates many stories within the framework of the major tale, and as a consequence any selection needs adaptation in order to appear as a separate narrative.

THE KNIGHT'S TALE. (England: Late Fourteenth Century.)

The *Canterbury Tales*, from which this story is taken, were the last of Chaucer's major works, and were written during the last twenty years of the fourteenth century. The story of the origin of these tales is related in the celebrated Prologue: the assembling of the pilgrims at the Tabard Inn, Southwark, the departure on the road to Canterbury, and the beguiling of the way by telling stories. It is unlikely that Chaucer heard many of his stories from pilgrims; the *Knight's Tale* is in any case a free adaptation of the *Teseide* of Boccaccio.

THE WOOING OF BRUNHILD. (Germany: Twelfth Century.)

This story is a part of the celebrated *Nibelungenlied*, which was written in German by an unknown author towards the end of the twelfth century. The work is a compilation of ballad and epic dating from centuries earlier. There is, for example, a good deal of material that appears also in the Icelandic *Eddas*, and there can be no doubt that large portions of these works have a common ancestry.

The *Nibelungenlied* was forgotten, and did not come to notice again till the middle of the eighteenth century, when it exercised considerable influence on the literature and life of the German people.

In modern times, one is familiarized with the Nibelung stories through the music-dramas of Wagner, *The Ring of the Nibelungs* being the title given by him to a cycle of four such dramas. It would appear, however, that Wagner used an older version of the story; in any case, his individual handling of traditional stories makes his work an untrustworthy guide to the student of mythology.

THE ONE-EYED GIANT. (Ancient Greece: Eighth Century B.C. (?))

Nothing is known about the author of the *Odyssey*, and many scholars think that the story of the blind Homer, to whom the work is generally ascribed, is as mythical as most of the events of the epic itself. Nor is it certain when the author of the *Odyssey* lived, or when the work was written down. It is generally considered that the Greek epics refer to events already centuries old at the time of composition.

The *Odyssey* tells the adventures of Odysseus after the fall of Troy. The siege over, he set sail for Ithaca, his own

island, but he had to live through ten years of perilous adventure before he got home. The Cyclopes ("round-eyed") were a race of giants, and Polyphemus was the son of the sea-god, Poseidon. Poseidon took his revenge for the injury inflicted on his son, by delaying the return of Odysseus's ship to Ithaca.

ST. FRANCIS AND BROTHER WOLF. (Italy: Thirteenth Century.)

This story is one of the many, authentic and otherwise, which have gathered round the figure of Francis, saint and teacher of thirteenth-century Italy. The stories spread through Europe with the spreading of Franciscan doctrines and the founding of Franciscan monasteries.

The figure of St. Francis inspired several Italian painters; especially well known is Giotto's "St. Francis and the Birds." Laurence Housman's *Little Plays of St. Francis* bear witness to the influence that the figure of the saint is still able to exert on the imagination.

BEOWULF AND THE MONSTERS OF THE FEN. (England: Seventh Century.)

The text of the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*, received its present shape at the end of the seventh century or the beginning of the eighth. It is probable, though, that the substance of it was in oral circulation long before that time, and that an early form of *Beowulf* was told or sung by our forefathers before they set foot on these shores.

Some of the events referred to in the story are historical, particularly parenthetical references to the doings of individuals whom we know to have lived. The story in outline is of the nature of a folk-tale, and it would seem that Beowulf himself never existed.

The poem is written in the alliterative verse of the period. In the present retelling, one of the chief adventures of the poem has been adapted to form a complete story.

THE WOOING OF OLWEN. (Wales: Twelfth Century (?))

The *Mabinogion*, a mediæval collection of Welsh romances, had to wait for translation till the middle of the nineteenth century, when the work was undertaken by Lady Charlotte Guest. Its publication revealed Arthurian stories of extraordinary freshness, both in subject-matter and style. This retelling is based on a selection from one of Lady Guest's early editions, with several quotations from her text. The Welsh names have been a little modified.

The reader may wish to be assured that Kilbuck did finally win Olwen for his bride.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC. (Syria (?) Date unknown.)

Opinions as to the origin, date and authorship of the Old Testament are both varied and conflicting. There can be no purpose even in summarizing the available theories here.

This story is one of the many human tales with which the Old Testament abounds, and the few liberties which have been taken with the story, conform to modern usage in retelling Bible stories to children.

TWO TALES OF COUNT ROLAND. (France: Eleventh Century.)

Many tales are told of the famous Roland, one of the mighty peers of Charlemagne, who flourished in the eighth century. Of the many narratives the best known is the epic poem *La Chanson de Roland*, the authorship of which is uncertain. Most versions agree about the betrayal at Roncevaux, and the death of Roland.

TIL EULENSPIEGEL'S MERRY PRANKS. (Germany: Fifteenth Century.)

Nothing is known of the author of *Til Eulenspiegel*, a collection of light-hearted tales with one central figure as hero. The tales are all probably of popular origin, and many of them were well known before they were collected at the end of the fifteenth century. There were many editions in Germany alone, and the work was translated into several different languages.

A symphonic poem, *Til Eulenspiegel*, has been Dr. Richard Strauss's contribution towards keeping alive the memory of this important early German work.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE. (Ancient Rome: First Century B.C.)

This story is, properly speaking, a Greek myth, but there are no more than passing references to it in extant Greek literature. The story is retold in full by Vergil in his *Georgics*, and by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. This retelling is based on Ovid's version.

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE. (France: Thirteenth Century.)

Aucassin et Nicolette is written in the form of a "song-story"—a prose tale with passages of verse interspersed. The original music to which the verses were sung has been preserved.

The story is remarkable for the freshness of its sentiments, tenderness of its feeling and beauty of its language. The love passages have a warmth which no Teutonic literature of the period could have produced.

The name of the author is unknown.

The present story covers about half of the complete romance.

FEDERIGO'S FALCON. (Italy: Fourteenth Century.)

This tale is taken from the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, who was one of the greatest figures in European literature of the Middle Ages. The *Decameron*, like the *Canterbury Tales*, is a collection of stories woven into a general framework which serves as a background. The story of Federigo is a delightful tale, showing a high degree of development in the art of story-telling.

THE MIRACLE OF THE CID. (Spain : Thirteenth Century.)

Diaz de Bivar, whose exploits are described in the *Chronicle of the Cid*, was a Spanish nobleman in the service of King Fernando, who did much to defend the province of Castile from the Moorish invasions. He finally succeeded in driving out the pagans and in extending the power of his own king. There soon gathered round his person a number of marvellous stories, among which is included this tale of the miracle he wrought after his death.

These stories were collected in the thirteenth century, and an English translation was made in the nineteenth by Robert Southey.

SAMSON THE MIGHTY. (See note under ABRAHAM AND ISAAC.)**SIR BALIN AND THE ENCHANTED SWORD.**
(England: Fifteenth Century.)

Sir Balin is a part of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a collection of Arthurian romances in prose, published by Caxton in 1485. Publication by Caxton gave the book enormous popularity at the time. Malory's work lay

chiefly in the collection and retelling of the romances, most of which were already known from their French originals. *Le Morte d'Arthur* is considered to have been somewhat abridged in translation; even so, it progresses slowly and has numerous divagations.

Attempts have frequently been made to make young children read Malory's text as it stands, but the style, already slightly archaic in Malory's time, proves too difficult for the average child. The present version has been modernized.

HOW THOR WENT AMONG THE GIANTS. (Iceland: Thirteenth Century.)

Some of the most famous of the Teutonic tales are of Icelandic origin, and to two of the surviving manuscripts is given the name *Eddas*. These are distinguished as the Elder *Edda*, written in verse, and the Younger *Edda*, which tells many of the same stories in prose. Something about the authors of each is known, but it has to be remembered that both men acted largely as compilers, setting down stories which had accumulated from the ninth century.

This story is one of the many of which Thor is the hero.

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT. (England: Early Fifteenth Century.)

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an Arthurian romance of which similar versions exist in other languages. *Sir Gawain* was written down in about the year 1400, but there is a Celtic version of a much earlier date, and several thirteenth-century French versions derive from the Celtic. There is no doubt that the English version is the most perfect, both as a narrative and as a poem. Indeed, when

one remembers the rambling and incoherent nature of many Arthurian stories (e.g., *Parzival* and *Le Morte d'Arthur*), one is surprised at the directness with which the tale proceeds.

The poem is written in alliterative verse, something like that of *Beowulf* in structure.

The present version covers the whole story rather briefly.

REYNARD THE FOX AND HIS UNCLE BRUIN. (Germany: Early Thirteenth Century.)

There is no large measure of agreement as to the origin of the story *Reynard the Fox* from which this selection is taken. Flanders—Western Germany—Northern France: all have been named as the country of Reynard's origin. Some scholars think that a number of anecdotes, later cast into continuous form, were conceived by an Alsatian writer of the early thirteenth century.

The discovery of *Reynard the Fox* towards the end of the fifteenth century, led to its translation into many European languages. Caxton published a translation of the Flemish version of the story.

This story is adapted from a translation of the early German version.

PHRYXUS AND HELLE. (Ancient Rome: First Century B.C.)

Like the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, this Greek legend is not told very fully in any extant Greek text, though there are references to it in Herodotus and others. The full account is given in the *Fasts* of Ovid, to whom we owe several "first complete versions" of classical stories.

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM. (Persia: Eleventh Century.)

The story of *Sohrab and Rustum* is told in the *Shah-Nama*, or *The Book of Kings*. It was the work of the poet Firdawsi, who lived and wrote in the eleventh century. The epic, which records deeds of national heroism over several centuries, is comparable to the work of Homer in scope and treatment. This story is best known to English readers from the poem of Matthew Arnold, which relates in detail the fights (compounded as one fight) and the death of Sohrab. Further details are to be gathered from Matthew Arnold's own notes, and from the various translations of the epic.

PARZIVAL. (Germany: Early Thirteenth Century.)

The two episodes under this heading follow the version of Wolfram von Eschenbach, whose *Parzival* was written at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

France shares with Germany the honours for the origin of this story. Wolfram von Eschenbach admits making use of a French version of the legend, though he denies using the only known French version by Crétien de Troyes. In any case there is much that is Wolfram's own, particularly in the account of Parzival's boyhood.

It will be noted that the Grail in *Wolfram* is a stone, and this is possibly due to some mistranslation. In Crétien de Troyes the Grail is a "vessel" or "dish"; it is only in later versions that it becomes the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper. Some scholars maintain that the legend of the Grail originally came from Egypt.

Wagner's *Parsifal* gives a very individual version of the story; but the composer has succeeded in giving the whole tale a greater unity than it possessed in earlier versions, particularly that of Wolfram. The outline of the story can, in the latter case, be preserved only by drastic cutting.